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# **Cork Learning Neighbourhoods: Documenting the Impact on communities and Organisations in Cork City and Exploring Current and Sustainable Models of Practice**

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**CARL Research Project**

in collaboration with

**Cork Learning Neighbourhoods and the Mayfield  
Integrative Community Development Project  
(Mayfield CDP)**



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<b>Name and year of course:</b>	Year 2: Voluntary and Community Sector Management (MSocSc)
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## **What is Community-Academic Research Links?**

Community Academic Research Links (CARL) is a community engagement initiative provided by University College Cork to support the research needs of community and voluntary groups/ Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). These groups can be grass roots groups, single issue temporary groups, but also structured community organisations. Research for the CSO is carried out free of financial cost by student researchers.

CARL seeks to:

- provide civil society with knowledge and skills through research and education;
- provide their services on an affordable basis;
- promote and support public access to and influence on science and technology;
- create equitable and supportive partnerships with civil society organisations;
- enhance understanding among policymakers and education and research institutions of the research and education needs of civil society, and
- enhance the transferrable skills and knowledge of students, community representatives and researchers ([www.livingknowledge.org](http://www.livingknowledge.org)).

## **What is a CSO?**

We define CSOs as groups who are non-governmental, non-profit, not representing commercial interests, and/or pursuing a common purpose in the public interest. These groups include: trade unions, NGOs, professional associations, charities, grass-roots organisations, organisations that involve citizens in local and municipal life, churches and religious committees, and so on.

## **Why is this report on the UCC website?**

The research agreement between the CSO, student and CARL/University states that the results of the study must be made public through the publication of the final research report on the CARL (UCC) website. CARL is committed to open access, and the free and public dissemination of research results.

## **How do I reference this report?**

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The UCC CARL website has further information on the background and operation of Community-Academic Research Links at University College Cork, Ireland. <http://carl.ucc.ie>. You can follow CARL on Twitter at @UCC\_CARL. All of our research reports are accessible free online here: <http://www.ucc.ie/en/scishop/rr/>.

CARL is part of an international network of Science Shops called the Living Knowledge Network. You can read more about this vibrant community and its activities on this website: <http://www.scienceshops.org> and on Twitter @ScienceShops. CARL is also a contributor to Campus Engage, which is the Irish Universities Association engagement initiative to promote community-based research, community-based learning and volunteering amongst Higher Education students and staff.

## **Are you a member of a community project and have an idea for a research project?**

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## **Abstract**

Cork City, Ireland was awarded a learning city award from UNESCO's, Institute of Lifelong Learning (UIL) in 2015. The Cork Learning Neighbourhoods, which is one strand of the Cork Learning City, was first piloted in 2015 and now (in 2020) consists of six different learning neighbourhoods in Cork City. The Cork Learning Neighbourhoods aims to facilitate partnership and collaboration to strengthen leaning for all and lifelong learning opportunities in each neighbourhood. This research aims to document the impact of the Cork Learning Neighbourhoods as well as identify current and sustainable models of practice. A participatory research approach using a sequential transformative strategy to mixed methods was employed in this research. This allowed the research to collect data in a phase-by-phase manner. The findings show that the Cork Learning Neighbourhoods is positively impacting individuals and neighbourhoods social, identify, cultural and human capital and enhancing mental health. The research also shows that a neighbourhood centred integrative and participatory approach to a hybrid and evolving model of practice has been adopted across all Cork Learning Neighbourhoods. Financial and non-financial resources and supports from Cork Learning Cities partnering organisations and local organisations are key to the sustainability of the Cork Learning Neighbourhoods. The research concludes by stating that the UIL Learning Cities is setting the Global framework, Cork Learning City is adopting and leading this in Cork City and the Cork Learning Neighbourhoods, comprising of all of the local and city partnering organisations and individual learners, are realizing and putting this into action in their local learning neighbourhood.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Introduction Chapter**

The Cork Learning Neighbourhoods (CLN) is one strand of the Cork Learning Cities (CLC) initiative (Cork Learning Cities, 2019). In 2015 Cork City, Ireland was presented with a Learning City award by UNESCO's Institute of Lifelong Learning (UIL) at the second International Conference for Learning Cities in Mexico (Cork Learning City, 2019). As part of the CLC approach, the CLN was successfully piloted in Kocknaheeney (KLN) and Ballypheane (BLN) in 2015 – 2016. Following this, four more Learning Neighbourhoods were established. Mayfield (MLN) and The Glen (GLN) on the north side of the city and Togher and South Parish on the south side of the city. CLN currently consists of six learning neighbourhoods supported by local organisations and residence as well as citywide partnering organisations from the CLC. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship as well as the structure of the various CLN steering groups. Each of these areas will be expanded on further in the Literature Review chapter.





**Figure 1 – Cork Learning Neighbourhoods**

The purpose of this research is to document the impact of the CLN initiative and to analyse current and sustainable models of practice. This research has been conducted in partnership with the Cork Academic Research Links (CARL) in University College Cork (UCC), the Mayfield Integrative Community Development Project (Mayfield CDP) and the CLN. The aims and objectives of the research were discussed and agreed with the CLN city steering and research groups. Documenting the impact of this initiative has been an area of discussion in these groups for some time. It must be noted at this early stage that the researcher is a member of the Mayfield Learning Neighbourhood (MLN) and represents this group on the CLN city steering and research groups.

**Research questions:**

- What is the impact of the CLN initiative on local communities and organisations in Cork City?
- What models of practice are currently being used by these neighbourhoods?
- Are there sustainable models of practice that can support this initiative into the future?

**Research Aims:**

1. Identify and examine what is working well in the CLN initiative.
2. Identify and examine what the challenges are and how the initiative could be developed.
3. Document the contribution the programme has made in neighbourhoods.
4. Explore the different models of practice and collaborative processes.
5. Explore different models of practice nationally and international.

This research is structured into five chapters. Chapter one, literature review focuses on areas including national and international policy, learning societies and models of practice. Chapter two outlines the research methodology. Chapter three examines the results and analysis from data collection. Chapter four contains a discussion based on the results and literature review. Finally, a conclusion summarizes the research findings and analysis.

## **Literature Review Chapter**

### **Introduction:**

This literature review will explore key international and Irish national policy in the area of lifelong learning. It will examine the development of learning societies and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) learning cities and the impacts of lifelong learning. The literature review will conclude with an overview of documentation on CLC, CLN and international models of learning neighbourhoods.

### **Lifelong Learning and International Policy**

UNESCO, the European Commission and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are three international bodies that have produced policies on lifelong learning. These policies support the approach that lifelong learning is essential to education, the economy and society in general. Dave (1975: 43) emphasizes the scope and inclusiveness of lifelong learning as a *“comprehensive concept which includes formal, non-formal and informal learning extended throughout the life-span of an individual to attain the fullest possible development in personal, social and professional life. It seeks to view education in its totality and includes learning that occurs in the home, school, community, and workplace, and through mass media and other situations and structures for acquiring and enhancing enlightenment.”*

The “Learning to be” UNESCO report (Faure et al., 1972), outlined twenty-one principles important to an education system that in their view would result in a learning society. The report recommended *“lifelong education as the global master concept for education”* (Elfert, 2016: 3). The principles include, *“less formalism in institutions”* (Faure et al., 1972: 185), *“mobility and choice”* for all learning (ibid: 188), access to *“basic education”* (ibid: 192) and *“conventional and non-conventional educators”* (ibid: 218) where education becomes part of society and more people participate. The idea of lifelong education, according to Holford et al. (1998), came from the ‘Learning to be’ (Faure et al., 1972) report. A utopian view, this report called for a new democratic society, inspired by enlightenment, cosmopolitanism and humanism and where education prepares people for change (Elfert, 2016). It could be argued

that this report is considered to be one of the most important documents on educational reform in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Longworth, 2003).

Holford (1998: 7) outlines that there are three main concepts in this report. The first concept is “*vertical integration*” and this refers to the lifespan of lifelong learning or learning throughout people lives. Skager and Dave (1977), when evaluating a multi-national curriculum project, outline the importance of vertical articulation through connections and the importance of pre and post school education and recognising these educational times as equal partners to schooling rather than supplementary to schooling. Longworth (2003: 7) suggests that vertical integration supports a “*learning society*” concept in which independent learning is central through people’s lives. Holford’s second concept is “*horizontal integration*” which refers to fostering education in all its forms, formal, non-formal and informal. Longworth (2003) identified this as situation specific learning and development of skills and abilities. Skager and Dave’s (1977) horizontal integration principal explores similar areas including the relationships between schools and other social institutions and structures that provide an educational platform. Skager (1978: 12) explores the orientation of self-growth in horizontal integration by describing it as the “*development in learners of personal characteristics that contribute to a long-term process of growth and development, including realistic self-awareness, interest in the work and in other people, the desire to achieve, internalized criteria for making evaluations and judgments, and overall integration of the personality*”. Holford’s final concept is “*democratization*”, which refers to increasing access for all in lifelong learning and the need for learners to participate in the design and management of their learning (Holford, 1998: 11). This concept is also supported by Skager and Dave (1977) when they identify the necessity of equality of educational opportunities for all regardless of personal differences and self-directed learning can develop skills and competencies to plan, execute and evaluate one’s own learning activities or as a member of a learning group. Longworth, while discussing community learning, states that democratization supports “*the involvement of the community in the learning process and the wider social role of education in understanding conflict, violence, peace, the environment and how to reconcile differences*” (Longworth, 2003: 7).

Early definitions of lifelong learning by Faure et al. (1972) and Skager and Dave (1977, 1978) encapsulated “*humanistic values and an evolutionary nature*” (Ouane, 2009: 304). While the concept of lifelong learning has grown, those values continue to be seen in how lifelong learning has developed, and been structured and defined at international level. UNESCO’s Delors report, entitled ‘Learning: The Treasure within’ (Delors et al., 1996) is also

considered an important document in establishing lifelong learning as a global educational paradigm (Elfert, 2015). According to Peter Mortimore (Director of the Institute of Education, University of London), UNESCO established a commission between 1993-1995, to “*study and reflect on the various challenges facing education in the new millennium and to make a series of recommendations to serve as an agenda for renewal and action*” which resulted in the Delors report (Mortimore, 1999: 108). Four pillars around which education and learning should be organised are identified in the report (Elfert, 2015; Mortimore, 1999). They are ‘Learning to know’; ‘learning to do’; ‘learning to live together’ and ‘learning to be’ (Delors et al., 1996). ‘Learning to know’, refers to a thirst for knowledge throughout one’s life and learning how to learn (Delors, 2013). ‘Learning to do’ describes the acquisition of competences (Mortimore, 1999) or packaging of skills from knowledge learnt (Delors, 2013). ‘Learning to live together’ described by the commission as one of the most important pillars, “*embodies developing an understanding of other peoples’ histories, traditions and cultural values*” (Mortimore, 1999: 109). Finally, ‘Learning to be’, described by Delors as the most difficult pillar, refers to “*developing the creative potential of each individual, in all its richness and complexity*” (Delors, 2013: 323).

The Commission of the European Communities published a ‘Memorandum on Lifelong Learning for Active Citizenship in a Europe of Knowledge’ in 2000. It states that “*Lifelong Learning is no longer just one aspect of education and training; it must become the guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts. The coming decade must see the implementation of this vision*” (Commission of European Communities, 2000: 3). According to Longworth (2003: 10), policy papers created by the European Commission, mirrored and updated that of Faure et al.’s (1972) report and recommendations. The business section of the European Union, UNICE, outlined that lifelong learning not only encourages economic competitiveness and employability but aims at fostering social cohesion, developing individuals and developing active citizenship (UNICE, 2001). According to Field (2002), the four main objectives, Active Citizenship, Social Inclusion, Employability and Personal fulfilment, outlined in the ‘European Memorandum on Lifelong Learning’ provides the foundations for future policy goals in this area.

The OECD outlined its approach to lifelong learning through a number of different publications including ‘Lifelong Learning for all’ (OECD, 1996) and ‘Overcoming exclusion through Adult Learning’ (OECD, 1999). In one of their more recent documents called ‘Qualifications Systems Bridges to Lifelong Learning’, they outline that lifelong learning is

contextualised through improving knowledge and competencies for all individuals who wish to participate in learning across their lifespan and this approach, while similar to UNESCO, can be viewed in four main features (OECD, 2007: 10). The first feature is “*a systemic view*”, which describes the supply of learning opportunities in all its forms and across the entire lifespan, being part of a connected learning system. The second feature is “*Centrality of the learner*” which highlights the shift from formal institutional learning to a “*demand side of meeting learner’s needs*”. The third feature is “*motivation to learn*”, which encapsulates “*learning to learn through self-paced and self-directed learning*”. The final feature is multiple objectives of education policy, which sets out to recognise the aims of education including “*personal development, knowledge development, economic, social and cultural objectives*” and an acknowledgement that these aims may change throughout a person’s life (OECD, 2007: 10). <sup>[P]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

In 2006, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) was created. It set out to strengthen adult and lifelong learning, foster a holistic and integrated approach to lifelong learning and help to “*build bridges and networks for cross-fertilization and sharing of knowledge, experience and tools*” for learning between nations (Ouane, 2009: 310). The UIL has a specific focus on “*literacy, non-formal education, and adult and lifelong learning*” (Elfert, 2013: 280). Currently, the UIL focuses on three programmes, Lifelong Learning policies and Strategies, Adult Learning and Education and Literacy and Basic Skills. The Lifelong Learning programme focuses on “*Lifelong learning policies analysis, Recognition, validation and accreditation, national qualifications frameworks and learning cities*” (UNESCO, 2020a). The area this research is most interested in is the UNESCO Learning Cities, as the Cork Learning Neighbourhoods draws on the vision of this concept (O’Sullivan et al., 2017). O’Tuama connects this by stating “*Learning Neighbourhoods were conceived in the context of learning cities, with a strong focus on acting locally and thinking globally*” (2020: 4 forthcoming).

## **Lifelong Learning and Irish Policy**

In the Irish context, the Department of Education and Science (DES) produced its first White Paper on adult education called ‘Learning for Life’ in 2000. It outlines their aims to adopt lifelong learning as the governing principle of educational policy. It defines adult education as a “*systematic learning undertaken by adults who return to learning having*

*concluded initial education or training*” and identified six priorities in the area (DES, 2000: 12).

- Consciousness Raising
- Citizenship
- Cohesion
- Competitiveness
- Cultural Development
- Community Building

Prior to this, lifelong learning was discussed in a number of reports including ‘Lifelong learning: The Report of the Commission on Adult Education’ (Kenny, 1984) and DES reports including ‘Charting our Education Future’ (DES, 1995) and ‘Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning’ (DES, 1998). The ‘Learning for Life’ White Paper represented a shift from a front loaded model of practice to a lifelong learning model of practice, which had an impact on other areas including governmental programmes and approaches (Doona, 2007). These included the 2000 and 2007 National Development Plans (Government of Ireland, 2000a; 2007), where lifelong learning was outlined as a key driver to encourage social inclusion, employment, competitiveness and growth, environmental sustainability and regional balance, the ‘Programme for Prosperity and Fairness’ (Government of Ireland, 2000b) where lifelong learning was a central theme in supporting equality of opportunity and anti-poverty strategies, and ‘Tomorrow’s Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy’ (EGSFN, 2007) where driving the lifelong learning agenda was key to their ten year strategy.

According to Maunsell et al. (2010), only 3 euro of every 100 euro was spent from the DES budget on adult education, which is recognised as an integral part of the lifelong learning agenda. On the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ‘Learning for Life’ White Paper, AONTAS, the Irish National Association of Adult Education, which promotes the development of a learning society in Ireland, held a policy day to identify this anniversary as a milestone to “*make the case for a new sustainable multi-annual funding model for community education*” (AONTAS, 2020). Maunsell et al. (2010) outlined that the roll out of lifelong learning is slow in Ireland, even though there is a range of reports and educational structures that support the idea that lifelong learning is a key strategy to overcome Ireland’s economic and social vulnerabilities. They also highlight concerns among community education groups that there is a move away from education for social capital reasons to “*education for economic reasons*” (ibid, 2010: 5).

While the development of lifelong learning in Ireland is considered slow among some, lifelong learning remains an integral part in future Irish policy, with specific mentions of lifelong learning in the creativity, economy and prosperity sections of the Ireland 2040 policy plan (Government of Ireland, 2019). This would suggest that policy makers see the value and potential for lifelong learning to continue to impact positively on society.

## **Lifelong Learning and Impact**

As policy on lifelong learning has developed, so has the understanding of the impact of lifelong learning in areas including human, social, identify and cultural capital (Schuller, 2010; O'Brien & O'Fathaigh, 2007; O'Tuama, 2020). Human capital refers to the skills and qualifications individuals have acquired. According to Schuller (2010) human capital is mainly developed through formal education. He also suggests that informal learning plays a part in human capital and people use this not only in the work place, but also in community and social landscapes. O'Brien and O'Fathaigh (2007: 215) suggest that human capital has been a significant instrument in *"promoting educational credentials as a fundamental value-added factor in economic success"*. They also suggest that human capital theory enhances the conversation of *"individualism, freedom of choice, employability and self-improvement"*, as well as being intertwined with social democratic theory, where the promotion of education is used as an approach to increase levels of equality of opportunity (O'Brien & O'Fathaigh, 2007).

Exploring social capital and lifelong learning, Field (2005: 32) suggests *"people with the best connections are more likely to take part in lifelong learning"*. This is supported by Elsdon et al. (1995) and Coleman (1988) in the context of non-formal and formal learning respectively. Schuller (2010: 110) describes social capital as *"participation in networks where values are shared, so that the people contribute to common goals"*. He states that networks can be local or global. He goes on to say that while social capital is a *"powerful way of increasing access to networks"* it may not be acquired through education, as skills are (Schuler, 2010: 110). Putnam (1995) suggests that people with higher education levels are more likely to participate in community activities and voluntary organisations as well as being more engaged with politics. This view is also supported by the OECD in its Education at a Glance reports (OECD, 2009). According to Courtney (1992: 39) *"much of what is listed as adult education is in fact a continuation of formal schooling for certain categories of occupation and the general population"*. He goes on to suggest that formal adult education is more often accessed



by younger adults with higher levels of income and schooling and that participation in adult education leads to individuals to engage and participate in other forms of society and community. Mayombe (2018, in O'Tuama, 2020: 60) supports Courtney's latter point regarding engagement and participation by suggesting that adult education can *"equip mature people with the knowledge required for active participation in the political, economic, and social life of their communities"*. Green et al. (2003) highlight that while education and learning may increase individual's levels of community participation that does not necessarily lead to social cohesion. In contrast Putnam (1995) outlines that social capital *"is important to social cohesion since it facilitates coordinated action and mutual trust"* and concludes that education and learning can strengthen one's social capital.

The term identity capital was first coined by James Cote (1997), and refers to the capacity to sustain one's *"healthy self-esteem, and a sense of meaning and purpose in life"* (Schuller, 2010: 110). Cote (2005: 221) identified that choice making is key to identify capital and suggests creating an *"education for choice to enhance the wider benefits of learning for both the individual, in terms of identity capital accumulation, and for the community with respect to intergenerational social capital building"*. Cultural capital can be categorised in three forms that serve as *"instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed"* (O'Brien & O'Fathaigh, 2007: 66). The first form is 'objectified' which is present in areas including qualifications and books. The second form is 'embodied' which encapsulates the characteristics of the learner including their learning disposition. The third form is 'institutionalised' which identifies the place of learning. O'Brien and O'Fathaigh (2007: 67) suggest that the *"symbolic appropriation"* of these forms is more valuable than physically possessing them in the context of culture capital.

<sup>[P]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub> Researchers agree that lifelong learning and learning in all its forms: *"formal, non-formal and in-formal"* (Field, 2005: 3) can impact on learners various forms of capital. Schuller (2010: 110) suggests that there is a *"growing consensus on the need for fresh thinking about the role of education in economic and social development, to get beyond simplistic reliance on single measures (such as a growth in qualifications as the sole driver) and to capture the complex interactions between the different components"*. Schuller outlines that human, social and identity capital (2010: 110) create a triad of support for individuals where each capital supports the other and in turn supports the individual to access and apply their learning and participate fully in their environment. O'Tuama (2020: 60) argues for the addition of cultural

capital to be included in the context of CLN as it creates an opportunity to “*acquire a minimum threshold of cultural currency*”.

## **Learning Societies and UNESCO Learning Cities**

The various impacts of lifelong learning as well as readying young people, through gaining skills and knowledge in education for adulthood, as well as supporting adults to continue to learn throughout their life, are features of a learning society (Field, 2005). The idea of a learning society came from the concept of reforming the education and training systems (Field, 2005). Holford et al. (1998), suggests that a learning society would have more equal distribution of resources across all domains of learning. O’Sullivan et al. (2017) outline that universal access to foundational level education not only supports the development of numeracy and literacy skills but can also develop life skills with an interest and positive attitude toward education and learning. Longworth (2003: 44) states that the goal of lifelong learning in a learning society is the “*empowerment of the learner*”. By empowering learners it will support them to network and create “*weak ties*” (Granovetter, 1983) and in turn create the possibility to “*facilitate new opportunities and more open ways to see the world*” (O’Sullivan et al., 2017: 529). According to Edwards (1997), there are three different discourses which differentially construct a learning society: Firstly, citizenship, where people have opportunities to understand their roles as citizens in a social democracy; Secondly, a learning market, which discusses learning opportunities for individuals in the context of development and participating in a market economy; Thirdly, participation, where learners congregate as tribes, where learning is the “*centrepiece of an active and socially – engaged lifestyle*” (Holford, 1998: 13). This supports Yang & Valdes-Cotera (2011) view that lifelong learning can act as a facilitator for social inclusion and sustainable development.

Kearns (2012), when discussing EcCoWell cities (Economy, Community, Well-being), suggests that the idea of a learning city emerged from the OECD policy ‘City Strategies for Lifelong Learning’ (OECD, 2012) where using lifelong learning to build partnership and a shared vision were central themes. According to Osborne et al. (2013), place-based learning in regions, cities, towns and communities has existed for a long time, but may be labelled differently. Longworth highlights that a learning community is a “*city, town or region which mobilises all its resources in every sector to develop and enrich all its human potential for the*

*fostering of personal growth, the maintenance of social cohesion and the creation of prosperity” (Longworth, 1999: 109).*

UNESCO’s Global Network of Learning Cities is an international policy-oriented network providing inspiration, know-how and best practice (UNESCO, 2020c). The Beijing Declaration and the Mexico City statement, where the first two UNESCO Learning Cities Conferences were held in 2013 and 2015 respectively, outline the objectives and strategies of the Learning Cities Network.

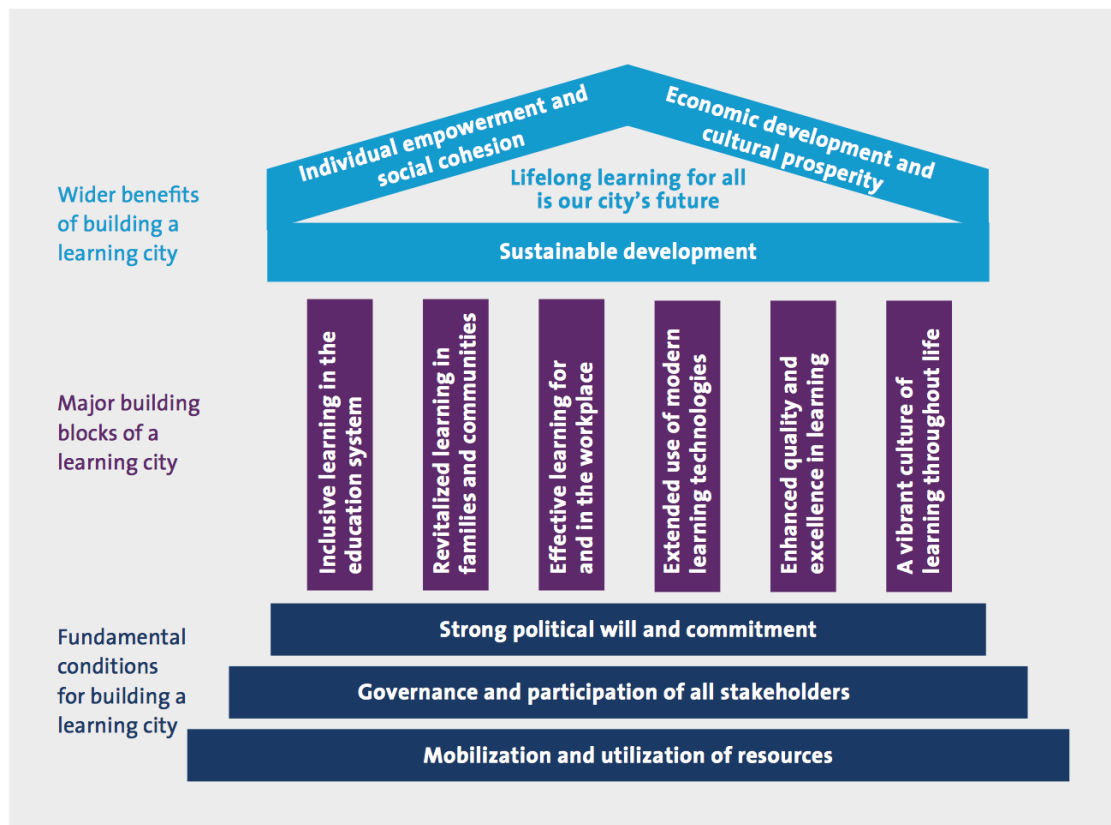
**The Beijing Declaration includes:**

- Empowering individuals
- Promoting social cohesion
- Enhancing economic development and cultural prosperity
- Promoting Sustainable Development
- Promoting Inclusive Learning in the Education System
- Revitalising learning in families and communities
- Facilitating learning for and in the workplace

(UNESCO, 2013: 3-7).

The Mexico City Statement (UNESCO, 2015b) sets out a strategic direction for sustainable learning cities including harnessing lifelong learning for citizen empowerment and solidarity and encouraging cross-sectorial and cross-community engagement to name but a few. These objectives are built on UNESCO’s (2020b) 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

UNESCO provides information on ‘Guidelines for Building Learning Cities’ (UNESCO 2015a). Planning, involving stakeholders, celebrating learning, promoting accessibility, monitoring and evaluating progress and mobilizing sufficient funding and resources are the key steps for developing a learning city. UNESCO (2015d) have also outlined key features of a Learning City, which were adopted at the 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference in Beijing and include; Governance and participation of all stakeholders, inclusive learning in the education system, enhanced quality and excellence in learning and lifelong learning for all in our city’s future. This document also outlines detailed measurements of the key features for cities to benchmark themselves against. Features of Learning Cities can be seen in figure 2.



**Figure 2: The Framework of the Key Features of Learning Cities**

(UNESCO, 2015d: 164)

According to UIL, Learning Cities cannot only support the localising of the SDG's goals, but it also believes that lifelong learning is key to achieving them and empowering people. They suggest that lifelong learning will equip and allow people to *“anticipate and tackle new challenges in their environment and contribute to providing solutions in the society”* (UNESCO, 2015c). This, they suggest can lead to a sustainable future and a life of dignity as well as lifelong learning opportunities for all with learning cities fostering a culture of learning throughout life. UNESCO outline that learning cities can create *“individual empowerment, social cohesion, economic and cultural prosperity and sustainability”* (UNESCO, 2018). UNESCO's SDG 4, to *“ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”* and SDG 11, *“making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”* are key targets for the learning cities agenda (UNESCO, 2017b: 5). As part of the third UNESCO Learning Cities Conference, hosted in Cork, Ireland in 2017, The ‘Cork Call to Action for Learning Cities’ (UNESCO, 2017a) was created. It outlined

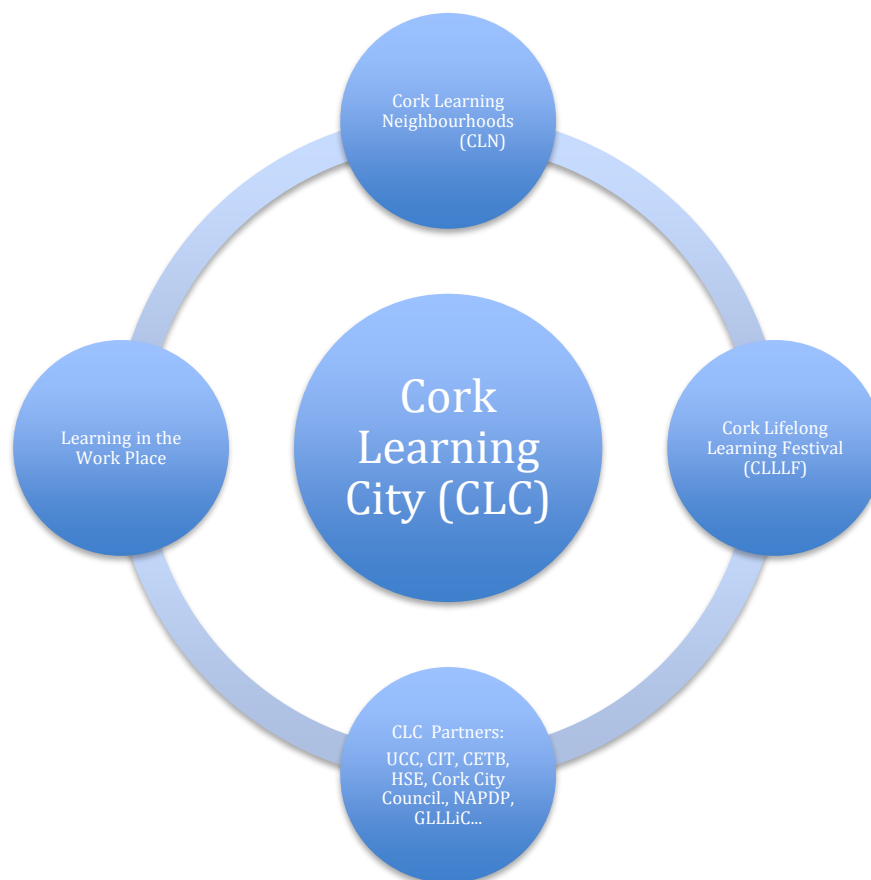
twenty-seven points pertaining to the actions Learning Cities would undertake into the future. These include “15. *recognising the role of lifelong learning as a driver for environmental, social, cultural and economic sustainability and acknowledging the importance of involving all stakeholders in the process*” and “18. *call upon all public and private actors, traditional and non-traditional stakeholders across all sectors in cities and communities, including higher education and training institutions as well as youth representatives, to come together in partnership to promote lifelong learning at local level in order to ensure that all generations are involved in the process*” (UNESCO, 2017a: 2).

When discussing learning cities, healthy cities and green cities in the context of EcCoWell, Kearns (2012: 386) suggests that a more integrated approach should be taken to these initiatives, which could result in fostering “*a rich milieu of innovative ideas and sharing of experiences*”. While learning cities or learning regions can be viewed in a humanistic way, MacPhail (2014) suggests that many of the models employed are business models. He suggests this may lead to lifelong learning becoming an exploitable economic resource with “*positive social spinoffs*” rather than having social and economic benefits considered equally (MacPhail, 2014: 96). John Tibbett (University of Glasgow) and Leone Wheeler (PASCALs, Learning Cities 2020 Programme) (2014: 1), aim to support cities to “*learn and address the issues they face, and to develop effective policy responses to those issues*” by measuring learning cities performance through capturing information from learners, identifying strengths and weaknesses and map stakeholder participation. The CLC and CLN supports this approach and have documented these types of information through CLN reports (O’Sullivan & Kenny, 2016; 2017).

### **Cork as a Learning City and Cork Learning Neighbourhoods**

Awarded a Learning City award by UIL in 2015, Cork City was one of only three European cities and one of twelve cities globally to be recognised that year (O’Tuama & O’Sullivan, 2016). To become a Learning City, the city was required to go through an audit of education, learning and other socio-economic indicators. The city also actively set out to achieve the twelve objectives of the Beijing Declaration on Building Learning Cities (UNESCO, 2013) and the Mexico City Statement on Sustainable Learning Cities (UNESCO, 2015b). Cork Learning City is led by the Cork City Council in partnership with UCC, Cork Institute of Technology (CIT), the Cork Education and Training Board (CETB), Health Service

Executive (HSE) and National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPDP), through a Memorandum of Understanding (O'Tuama & O'Sullivan, 2016). Cork Learning City outlines that learning for all, learning for life and learning for sustainable development is the essence of Cork being a Learning City. This can be seen through the Cork Lifelong Learning Festival (CLLLF), CLN and other learning initiatives throughout the city (Cork Learning City, 2019). Figure 3 outlines these activities and partnerships.



**Figure 3 CLC Partnering Organisations and CLC initiatives**

The concept of a learning neighbourhood was introduced to the Growing Lifelong Learning in Cork (GLLiC) group, by Peter Kearns, the former Director of PASCAL International Observatory Learning City Network, at the 2015 CLLLF (O'Sullivan & Kenny, 2017). The Cork City Profile (Cork City Council, 2014), highlights that certain geographical areas in Cork City are considered educationally disadvantaged (O'Tuama & O'Sullivan, 2016). The GLLiC group decided to adopt the Learning Neighbourhoods idea as a way of tackling aspects of these inequalities (O'Sullivan & Kenny, 2017). The CLN pilot was established in

2015 in two areas of the city that were considered educationally disadvantaged. These areas were Ballypheane (BLN) on the south side of the city and Knocknaheeny (KLN) on the north side of the city. These pilot programmes were supported by the CLC partnering organisations (O’Sullivan & Kenny, 2016). Since then, four more neighbourhoods have joined the CLN initiative. Mayfield (MLN) and the Glen (GLN) on the north side of Cork city and Togher (TLN) and South Parish (SPLN) on the south side of Cork City. Local steering groups, involving learning and educational organisations and local networks and community members, work collaboratively to promote and develop lifelong learning in their neighbourhoods.

An early working version of CLN describes it as *“an area that is constantly strengthening its practice in learning, providing a diversity of learning opportunities for the whole population through partnership and collaboration”* (O’Tuama & O’Sullivan, 2016: 3). O’Tuama (UCC, 2015) identified three practical approaches the CLN initiative initially targeted. They were *“trying to get people to recognise what they are doing already”*, network more closely and develop new lifelong learning initiatives in each neighbourhood. Being a member of a learning neighbourhood is more about identity, locality and a sense of membership for all age groups on the basis of presence rather than a legal or residential status. *The term “denizen”* was adopted to capture this (O’Sullivan et al., 2017: 534). The CLN identifies seven steps describing how to build a Learning Neighbourhood. They are *“co-create, consult and involve, celebrate what is good, communicate and connect, develop the sustainability of initiatives, develop a bottom-up approach, promote new as well as support existing activities and promote equality and inclusion”* (O’Sullivan & Kenny, 2017: 19).

The CLN are framed around *“community values of recognition, respect and dignity”* as well as a community wide openness to learning exchange (O’Tuama, 2020: 11 forthcoming). According to O’Tuama (2020: 53) the CLN has been an emerging and evolving model, but is essentially about *“collaboration and coalition building, extending networks and prioritising learning (horizontally and vertically) among and between generations and the positive leverage of all and every resource to enhance the process”*. The CLN Programme reports (O’Sullivan & Kenny 2016; 2017) demonstrate this emerging model and how CLN is being realised in each neighbourhood. It could be suggested that the Learning Neighbourhoods is a model in itself, which has the ability to link community development, lifelong learning and resilience by building on *“existing networks, assessing local needs and promote collaboration within the community”* and share practice within the city and connecting with other cities through the UNESCO Learning Cities initiative (O’Tuama, 2020: 54).

O'Tuama (2020: 56) argues that lifelong learning and community development are interlinked, and highlights that a learning neighbourhood is the joining of "*learning, knowledge and place making*". The relevance of 'place' and place making is also important to consider in the context of the Learning Neighbourhoods. Tcherepashenets & Snyder (2011) state that learning about place and forming community is crucial in the development of sustainable communities. This is important to consider in the context of a sustainable and flexible model of practice. This would also suggest there may be direct and indirect benefits to education and learning which may include a person or communities ability to influence well-being and their capacity to face risk (O'Sullivan et al. 2017) as well as the potential for learners to accumulate different forms of capital as explored above, which according to O'Tuama (2020) is a key component of the CLN.

### **Models of Practice and Learning Neighbourhoods**

According to Kearns (2020: 1) Learning Cites set the framework, it is learning neighbourhoods that foster "*learning throughout life, build understanding and social coherence, and inculcates the civic and moral values that underpin well-being and sustainability in a context of constant change*". As outlined earlier, the CLN working definition states that partnership and collaboration is key to achieving its vision (O'Sullivan & Kenny, 2016) and it is rooted in an integrated model of community development, lifelong learning and resilience (O'Tuama, 2020). O'Brien & O'Fathaigh, (2007: 216) suggest that while a one size approach cannot support all communities, they describe a learning partnership as "*the will to support the development of a learning community that serves as an advocate for local learning needs.*" They emphasise that the success of partnership and collaboration depends on how well the "*communicative mechanism itself is founded and enacted*" (O'Brien & O'Fathaigh, 2007: 214). In the context of policy-making, they suggest that partnership at local and national level can lead to increased levels of democratisation, empowerment and resource commitment. They also suggest that while this is commendable, it is important not to see a partnership and collaborative approach as compromise or a common agreement and to move beyond this with an understanding of the problematic, complexity and reality of a true partnership process. The reality is partnership and collaboration is about taking on-board others' view, ideas and concerns, which by its very nature can create considerable challenges for groups (O' Brien & O'Fathaigh, 2007).



Having a clear understanding of the values, direction and goals of an initiative are essential to success and sustainability. In the context of social inclusion, O'Brien & O Fathaigh (2007) outline three theoretical themes that are central to learning partnerships with empowerment underscoring each theme. They are barriers to educational participation, which include institutional barriers, financial factors, prior education and learning, attitudes to learning, social capital and adult learning experiences. Learning Neighbourhoods “offer a potential community level model to generate sustainable, flourishing, inclusive, learning environments” (O'Tuama, 2020: 2 Forthcoming) based on values of community recognition, respect and dignity. In this context, it could be argued that social valorisation plays a role in a partnership and collaborative Learning Neighbourhoods model, as ‘denizens’ are required to fulfil this model and in turn may develop valued social roles in their neighbourhoods and cities (Aubry et al., 2017).

Lifelong learning in the context of partnership and collaboration at local, national or international level, suggests that the aim is to support both informational learning as well as transformational learning (Baumgartner, 2001). Transformative learning theory describes the manner in which perspectives, words, thoughts and meaning can transform ones lived experiences (O'Brien & O'Fathaigh, 2007). Mezirow (1998) outlines a transformational approach can support learners to inform action, increase decision making capacity and view reality from different perspectives. Freire (1972) describes how this approach can support learners to reflect on their circumstances and empower them to free themselves from cultural norms and oppression. A transformational change model can highlight the connection between individual development and learning. In the context of the CLN, it can be argued that the initiative aims to create a structure where not only transformational change happens for the individual, but for the whole neighbourhood from the bottom up. The CLN could be seen as supporting and enhancing the development of a learner's ecosystem by providing a structure to not only develop and build on their lifelong and lifewide learning but also increase their capacity to build a community network that is grounded in learning and in turn contribute positively in their neighbourhood, city and region. According to O'Tuama (2020: 58) “*Learning Neighbourhoods are about promoting learning cultures that are lifelong and lifewide*”. Kearns (2020), while highlighting examples of Learning Neighbourhoods (Appendix 1) in Kuoshum Neighbourhood, Datong district, Taipei, Twaiwan and Harlem in New York as well as CLN, he highlights that a sustainable learning neighbourhood involves the complex interweaving of many strands including philosophies, religion, arts, culture and shared interests

to name but a few, which can be achieved through collaborative community projects, which in turn can “*build a good learning city from the grassroots up*” (Kearns, 2020: 2). Despite the substantive work in defining and understanding learning cities and learning neighbourhoods as well as the importance of lifelong learning, there has been little or no exploration in terms of systematic research of the outcomes, impact and processes of learning neighbourhoods.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This chapter explores the research design and approach chosen in this project and describes the use of a participatory mixed methods methodology on a phase-by-phase basis. A mixed methods design provided a framework to allow both qualitative and quantitative data to be collected for this research, which allowed for a more complete analysis and understanding

of the impact and models of practice in CLN. An overview of data processing and analysis, and ethical considerations conclude the chapter.

### **Selecting a Research Design:**

The researcher analysed different methodologies to best support this research project. A participatory, mixed methods approach was selected as the most appropriate for the study. Participatory research employs dialogical research methods, as discussed by Freire (1972) and facilitates users as well as stakeholders, to generate knowledge on the research subject (Padilla, 1993). A mixed methodological approach integrates both qualitative and quantitative data collection allowing triangulation of data sources in order to give greater validity to the outcomes of the research. According to Newman & Benz (1998), qualitative and quantitative research approaches should not be viewed as polar opposite but instead viewed at different ends of a continuum. This would suggest that a mixed methodology approach is somewhere in the middle of this continuum, bringing together positivist and inductive approaches.

According to Creswell *“Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem”* (2014: 32). When considering the nature of this study, documenting, exploring and understanding CLN members experiences and perspectives was important in identifying the impact of the initiative on individuals, neighbourhoods and organisations as well as exploring models of practice. Creswell describes quantitative research as an *“approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables”* (2014: 32). In quantitative research, instruments are used to measure and analyse these sets of variables. Understanding and measuring variables of the CLN was important in documenting the impact of the initiative using statistics and identifying variations of models of practice. Mixed methods research, *“is an approach to inquiry involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data, and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks”* (Creswell, 2014: 32).

A philosophical worldview considers the basic set of beliefs that guide research (Guba, 1990). According to Creswell, these can also be called *“paradigms, epistemologies and ontologies”* and he outlines four worldviews (Creswell, 2014: 35). They are postpositivism, a scientific cause and effect view; constructivism, which is mainly used in qualitative research

and rooted in understanding different views; transformative which provides a voice for participants to support positive change in their lives and; pragmatic, action based research where the research problem is emphasised and mixed methods are used to understand the problem. Considering the context of this research, a transformative worldview has been adopted, as the research is participatory and provides opportunities for participant's voices to be heard, which has the potential to create positive change.

By drawing on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data, a mixed methods approach can give a more complete understanding of the research questions (Creswell, 2014). Mixed methods research allows for a comparison of both types of data and supports research to explain quantitative results with qualitative follow-up and visa versa. The challenges of mixed methods include collecting large volumes of data, time required to analyse, compare and contrast both types of data and the need for the researcher to understand both data collection processes (Creswell, 2014: 267). Other challenges include difficulty in representing lived experiences through qualitative and quantitative data, legitimisation or trustworthiness of outcomes and integration of methods leading to multiplicative and additional threats which may amplify outcomes (Onwuegbuzie and Johnson, 2006).

According to Creswell (2014: 43) there are four models of inquiry or strategies to mixed methods research. Firstly a convergent parallel strategy provides a comprehensive analysis of the identified problem. Secondly, an explanatory sequential strategy initially collects quantitative data and then examines' this further using qualitative data. Thirdly, an exploratory sequential strategy uses qualitative data and then analyses this further using quantitative data. Finally, a transformative strategy is where social justice is to the fore and contains both qualitative and quantitative data collection. Transformative strategies can be either convergent or sequential.

A participatory research approach using a sequential transformative strategy and transformative worldview to mixed methods was employed in this research. It enabled the research to gather diverse perspectives about the initiative, time to process these perspectives before each new phase and allowed for better advocacy of participants which led to a better understanding of the impact of the initiative and models of practice. The potential outcome of the research could lead to positive change for individuals and the neighbourhoods themselves as well as the wider CLN. There are challenges in using a sequential transformative strategy to mixed methods, including deciding what findings in one phase will be focused on in subsequent

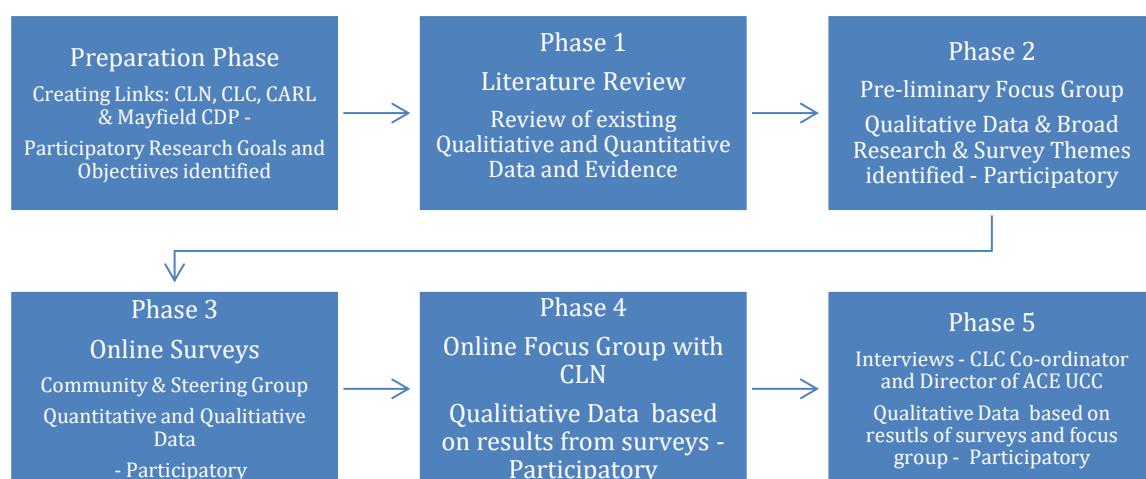
phases (Creswell, 2009: 213). Utilizing a participatory approach in key phases of the research mitigated against this, by collaboratively guiding the sequential method and findings from phase to phase.

## **Research Design**

The sequential transformative design involved a preparation phase and five data collection phases, which are outlined in Figure 4. Originally, there were 4 phases planned to be carried out face to face. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, phase's 3 (surveys) and 4 (focus group) were carried out online and phase 5 (interviews) was added. A combination of primary and secondary data was collected over the five phases. A participatory approach was also taken to the design as well as each phase of the research project. It could be argued that the CLN steering group members were co-creators of the research as they were actively involved in identifying the scale, aims and methodology of the project as well as being involved in data collection. Co-creative processes places empowerment and participation for those whose life-world and meaningful actions are under study (Cullinane & O'Sullivan, 2020 Forthcoming).

**Figure 4 – Overview of Methodology**

### **Participatory Research Approach using a Sequential Transformative Strategy to Mixed Methods**



## **Preparation phase**

In 2019, the CLN Research Group was established. This group identified the CLN initiative as a research gap. The research group also identified that the CARL initiative in UCC, could potentially support research in this area. As the researcher was a member of the CLN steering and research groups he proposed that he would undertake this research, in partnership with CARL, Mayfield CDP and CLN, as part of a master's programme he was undertaking in the School of Applied Social Sciences in UCC.

A participatory approach was taken to identify the purpose and direction of this research. At each research and CLN group meetings the project was discussed and members had opportunities to input into the overall research direction. The researcher met and discussed a preliminary proposal with the CARL coordinator, the manager of the Mayfield CDP and the researcher's supervisor. All parties signed a research contract (Appendix 2). The researcher also met with the CLN coordinator, the CLC coordinator and had informal discussions with members of the GLiCC group regarding the research. Following this, the researcher presented a research proposal to the CLN steering group, where it was agreed and supported by all in attendance.

## **Phase1 – Literature Review**

According to Harte (1998: 13), a literature review contains *“ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic”*. This approach was chosen to understand the broader context of the CLN and consider different approaches and models. The literature review provided grounding for each phase in documentation and research. An initial literature review was conducted focusing on areas including lifelong learning, learning societies and learning cities for the research proposal. As each phase continued and in response to the themes and outcomes arising from each phase, additional literature was consulted, analysed and added to the literature review.

## **Phase 2 – Preliminary Focus Group**

The CLN steering group participated in a preliminary focus group to discuss and identify concepts and themes of the initiative. Barbour (2007) highlights that this approach can

pay huge dividends, as it can harness the views of participants during preliminary work of the research. The researcher also created and introduced two sample surveys, based on the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities Guiding Document (UNESCO, 2015d) and UNESCO's Guidelines for Building Learning Cities (UNESCO, 2015a). The group discussed and advised on the structure and content of these sample surveys to ensure the surveys would gather relevant data in the next phase. The researcher made alterations to the surveys as outlined by the group. Both surveys went through an additional screening and testing by the researcher, the research supervisor and the CLN coordinator before phase three commenced.

### **Phase 3 – Community and Steering Group Surveys**

Phase three consisted of the distribution and completion of two surveys:

- 1) A community survey for people living, working and/or learning in each neighbourhood (Appendix 3)
- 2) A steering group survey, for members of each of the six local CLN steering groups, and people who represent partnering organisations on the CLN, CLC and GLLiC. (Appendix 4)

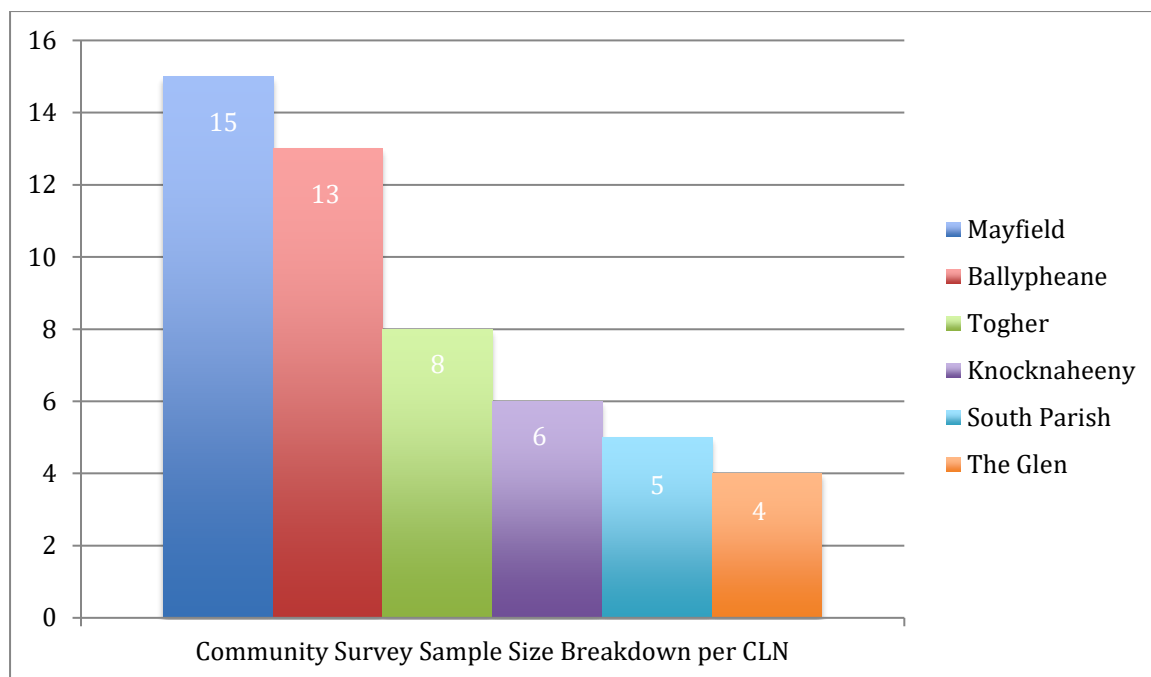
As this research is aiming to document impact, a descriptive, explanatory and exploratory approach to surveys was taken (Creswell, 2014). Both closed and open questions aimed to generate quantitative and qualitative data from participants about their experiences of the initiative. Dillman (in Saunders 2009: 368) outlines three types of data variables that can be collected through a survey. Firstly, opinion variables allow surveys to record what participants think or believe is true or false. Behaviour variables identify what people do, whether that's in the past, present or will do in the future. Thirdly, attribute variables provide data on the characteristics of the participants. While this research is mostly concerned with the opinion variables of its participants, data from all three variables were collected. Both surveys were distributed online and were standardised across neighbourhoods and groups. Seymour (2001) suggests challenges to online surveys include, the lack of visual or voices cues may lead to low response rates. To counteract this, local CLN steering group members provided support through phone calls to community respondents where required. Van Selin & Jankowski (2006) suggest that when conducting online surveys, researchers should consider questionnaire design

carefully. A participatory approach to research design was adopted in this research to ensure the surveys were well designed and accessible to community and steering group respondents.

## **Community Survey**

Originally, it was planned that the community survey would be available to be completed by community members at CLN events during the 2020 CLLLF. This could not take place as the festival was cancelled and Ireland entered a state of emergency due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A contingency plan was developed with input from the CLN coordinator, research supervisor and members of the CLN steering group. The survey was redesigned as an online survey. The researcher contacted representatives from all six CLN's and requested that they become part of the process of collecting data from community members in their area. With new data collectors, the research has added, due to necessity, another level of participation. Each representative had local "*insider*" knowledge (Cullinane & O'Sullivan, 2020: 16 Forthcoming), and collected responses from community members over the age of eighteen years based on a convenience sampling approach through e-mailing a survey hyperlink and phone call support where required. This approach also aimed to maximise the response rate, validity and reliability of the survey (Saunders et al., 2015), and ensure this phase was in line with CLN and CLC's inclusive approach (Cork Learning City, 2019). The community survey primarily focuses on documenting the impact and contribution of the initiative on communities through investigating individual's experiences and views as well as identifying demographics (Appendix 5) and previous educational attainment (Appendix 6). 69% of community respondents were female and 29 % male. The highest proportion (33%) of community respondents were aged between 55-66 years. 33% of respondents completed a certified course, 17% completed an uncertified course and 63% said they participate in informal learning in the past 12 months. The sample size of the community survey was 51 respondents, spread unevenly across the six Local CLN's (Figure 5).

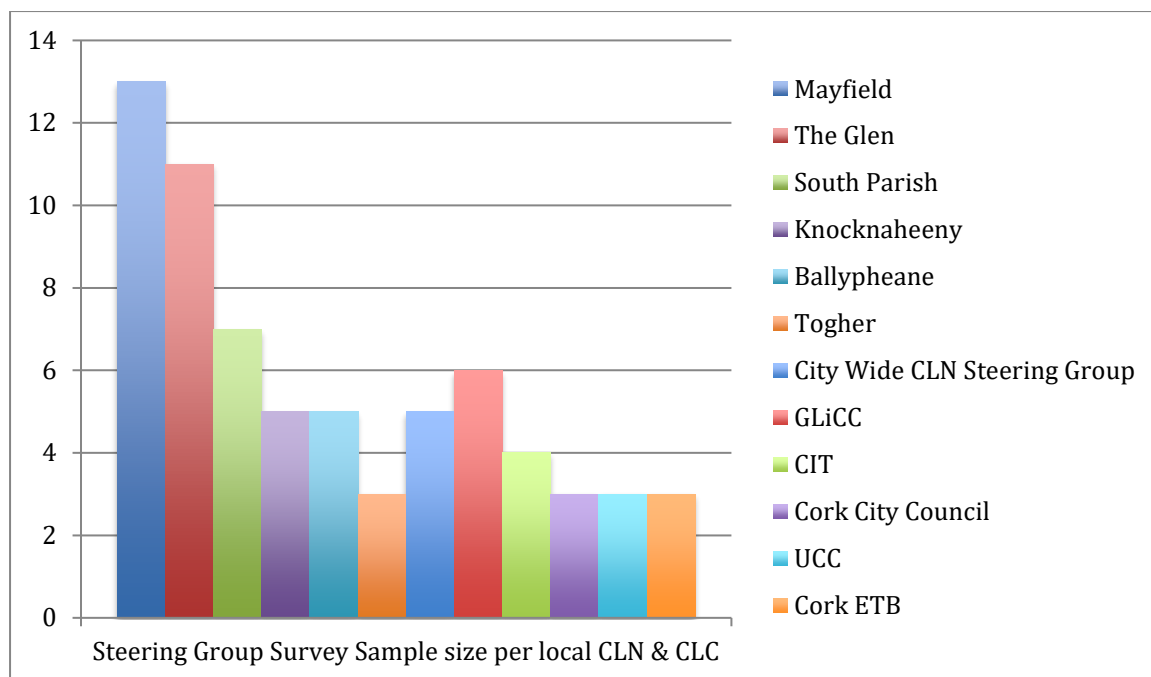




**Figure 5 – Community Survey Sample Size per Cork Learning Neighbourhood**

### **Steering Group Survey**

The steering group survey was planned to be an online survey from the outset of the research. Following testing and review, the steering group survey was disseminated via e-mail, by the CLN coordinator to all steering group members in each CLN and CLC partnering organisations (Appendix 7) The steering group survey focused on areas including governance, collaboration, inclusion, challenges as well as impact and contribution of the initiative on communities and organisations. The sample size of the steering group survey was 48 respondents spread across all six CLN's and CLC partnering organisations. Some respondents represented multiple groups in their response. Chart 2 shows a breakdown of groups represented in this survey.



**Figure 6 – Steering group survey sample size per local CLN and CLC partnering organisation.**

#### **Phase 4 – Focus Group**

The researcher collated the data from both surveys. The data was organised into broad themes and questions were created based on those themes and data. An online focus groups using Zoom teleconferencing was undertaken due to Covid-19 restrictions. According to Stewart and Shamdasani (2017: 50) online focus groups “*perform as well as face-to-face focus groups with respect to the elicitation of information from group participants*”. Challenges to this approach included access to devices and technology, internet connections and scheduling. These were overcome through support and advice to members before and during the focus group. The focus group consisted of representatives from the CLN steering group. The group supported a comprehensive analysis and understanding of the results arising from the data collected in the surveys. The group was audio recorded which allowed the researcher to analyse themes more comprehensively following the completion of the focus group.

#### **Phase 5 – Interviews**

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with Mr. Denis Barrett, Co-ordinator of CLC and Dr. Seamus O Tuama, Director of Adult Continuous Education (ACE) in UCC.

Creswell (2009: 179) outlines that while interviews allow the researcher “*control over the line of questioning*” there are limitations to this approach including the indirect information provided is “*filtered through the views of interviewees*”. Adopting a mixed methods approach mitigates against this limitation. Interviews were added to the research to facilitate additional participation of key leaders of the CLN. Interview questions were adapted from the focus group questions.

### **Data Processing and Analysis**

Quantitative data from the surveys were analysed through descriptive statistics. A thematic analysis of the opinion variables in the surveys, the focus group and interviews was also conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2013). A reflexive approach to thematic analysis based on organic coding supported the research to review the initial themes and cross-reference themes against quantitative and qualitative data-sets which lead to documenting the impact and identifying current and sustainable models of practice (Clarke, 2019). This allowed patterns to emerge from the data and themes to be identified in line with the research goals. Cross-referencing secondary data from the literature review with themes identified from data collected allowed the research to compare the outcomes of the CLN with national and international guidelines and policies.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This research followed ethical guidelines as set out by the UCC Code of Research Conduct (UCC, 2018). This ensured that participants at each phase gave their informed consent, had confidence in the research to collect and store data securely, confidentially and in line with GDPR regulations and conduct the research in a “*reliable, honest, respectful and accountable*” manner (UCC, 2018: 3). The researcher created information sheets and consent forms (see Appendix 8 for examples) for phases 2 – 5 based on templates provided by UCC (UCC, 2019). Each information sheet and consent form included information about the research and how participants would engage with each phase. Information about how data was

stored, participants right to anonymity and right to withdraw as well as outlining that participation was voluntary was also included.

Another ethical area considered was the dual role of the researcher. The research ensured there were measures in place to reduce bias and increase the reliability of the data and the overall research. Conducting the research in partnership with the CARL initiative, the Mayfield CDP and CLN as well as embracing a participatory approach and regular supervision allowed transparency and openness, which reduced any potential bias.

## **Results and Analysis**

### **Introduction**

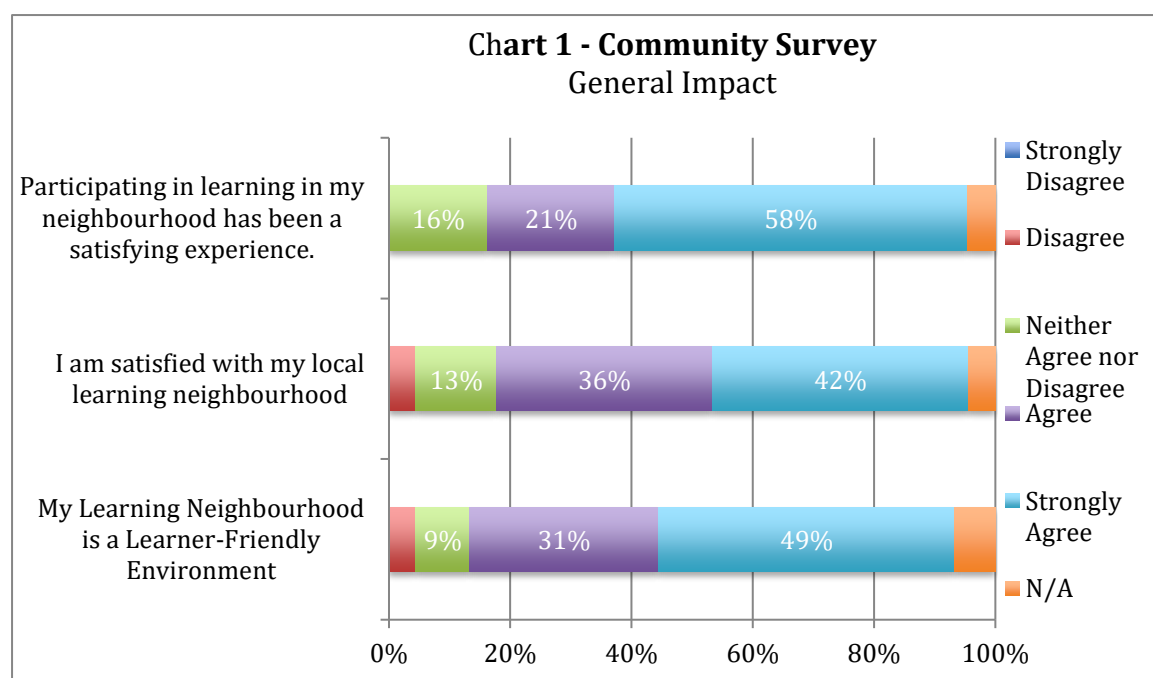
This chapter will present results and analysis arising from a thematic analysis and data from two surveys. Themes will be presented in two broad sections. Section one, 'impact' is divided into three themes; general impact; social capital impact; identity, cultural human capital and mental health impact. Section two will identify current and sustainable models of practices.

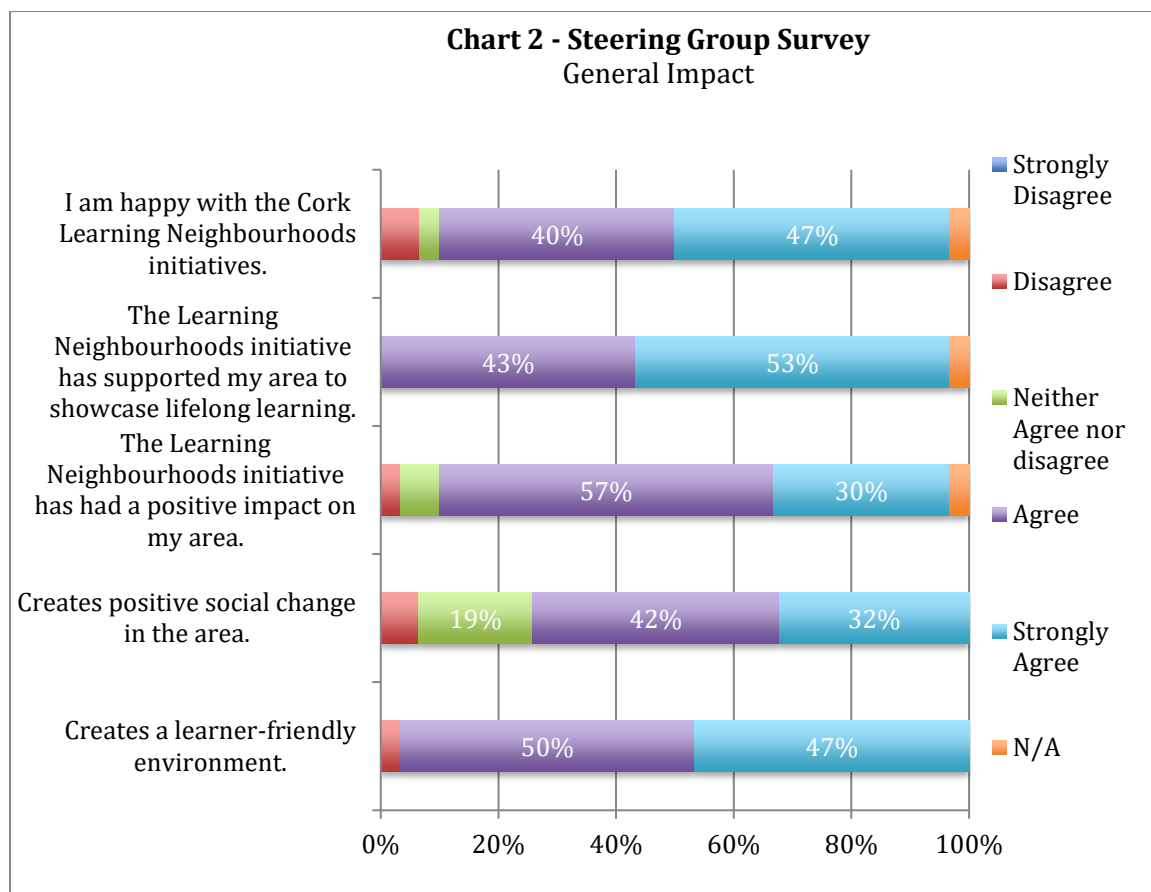
## **Section 1:**

### **Impact of the CLN initiative**

#### **Theme 1: General Impact**

Analysis of the respondents from the community survey reveal that 78% (Chart 1) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, ‘I am satisfied with my local learning neighbourhoods’. 87%, (Chart 2) of steering group respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, ‘I am happy with the Cork Learning Neighbourhoods initiative’. Data from these two charts also highlight that the CLN is having a positive impact socially, showcasing lifelong learning and creating a learner-friendly environment.





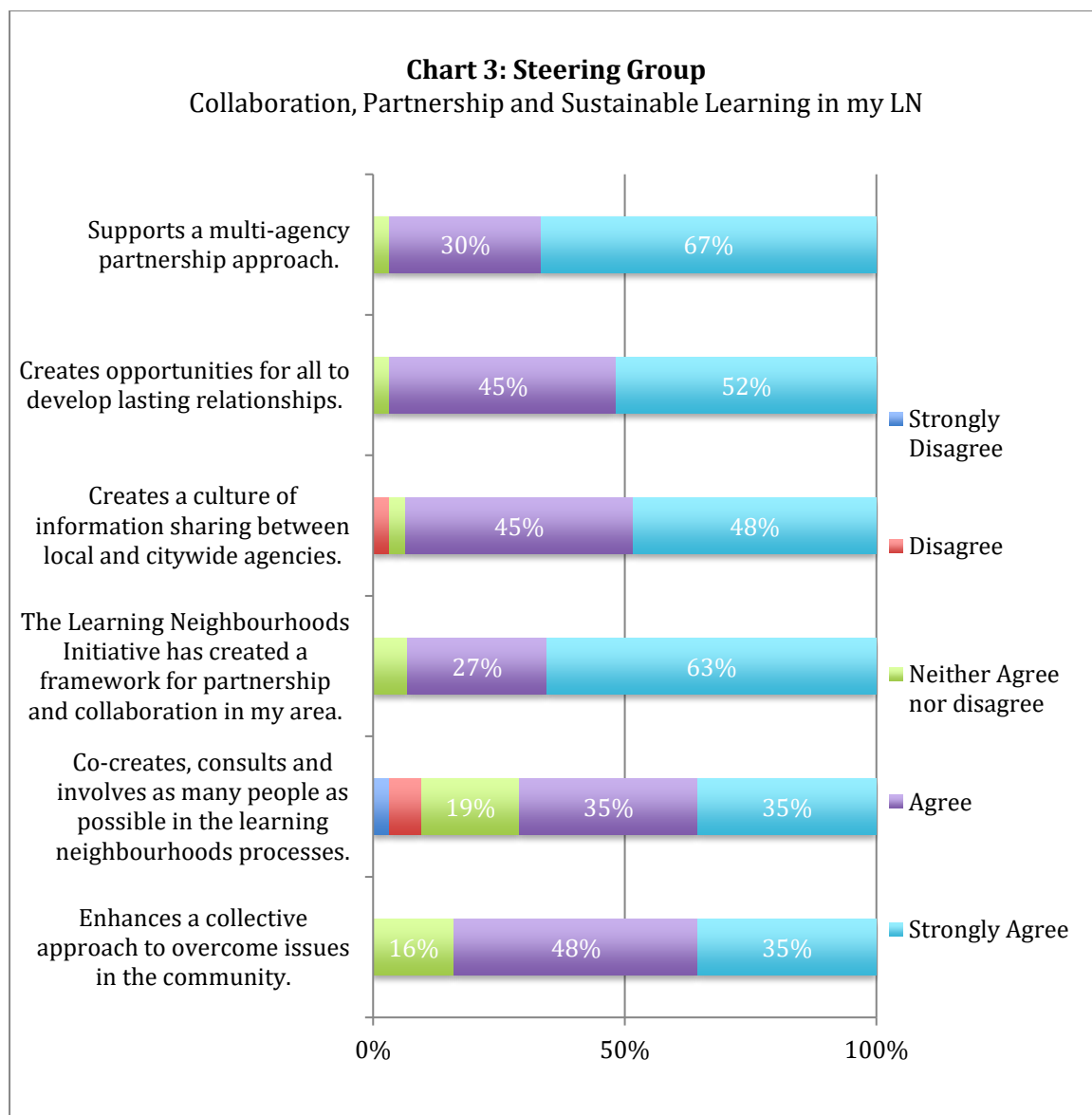
These impact areas were expanded upon by the focus group where themes including “*strong relationships*”, “*connections*”, “*valuing and building local learning*”, “*giving a sense of purpose*” and “*creating a sense of belonging*” were identified when asked ‘what does the CLN mean to you.’ When asked the same question, Mr. Barrett identified that the CLN “*translates to the strongest ambitions for the people in a city. It translates that into real action for an individual, a family, a small area, a street... and I think it creates identity*”. (See Appendix 9 for complete quotes). Themes including “*Learning*”, “*Community*”, “*Opportunity*”, “*Engagement*” and “*Networking*” were identified from the community survey respondents when asked about the positive contribution the CLN is making in their area. This evidence suggests that CLN is having a positive impact on neighbourhoods. These impact themes will be explored further throughout section 1.

## **Theme 2: Social Capital Impact**

The focus group identified a sense of belonging and connection through events and projects that celebrate, acknowledge and showcase learning as having a positive impact on learner's social capital. Sub-themes arising from the analysis under Social Capital Impact are; Connection and Partnership, Mutual Respect and Bottom up Approach; Celebrating, Recognising and Validating Existing Learning and Creating New Learning; Connection, Learning and Socialising; Learning for all, Inclusive Engagement and Sustainable Learning; Confidence, Self-esteem and Empowerment.

### **Theme 2.1 Collaboration and Partnership**

Collaboration and partnership is a key component to each local CLN. 97% of steering group respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements, 'My Learning Neighbourhood supports a multi-agency partnership approach' and 'My Learning Neighbourhood creates opportunities for all to develop lasting relationships'. 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agree with the statement 'My Learning Neighbourhood has created a framework for partnership and collaboration in my area.' (Chart 3)



The focus group identified that through this collaborative and partnership approach the CLN has created a new way of working and created awareness among communities and organisations of “*learning opportunities*” in their area. They also suggest the CLN has supported a more “*cohesive offering*” of learning as the initiative has led to a reduction of duplication of courses in some neighbourhoods and created a network of learning opportunities consisting of informal learning “*referrals*” between organisations in others. This would suggest that the CLN has created a shared learning environment where learners are actively informed of different learning pathways while also enhancing sustainable learning activities by encouraging learners to continue to participate in learning. The focus group also identified that the CLN, has allowed participating organisations to build relationships based on “*mutual respect*”. This has allowed resources, skills and knowledge



locally and at city level to be shared. This is supported by the steering group survey where 93% of respondents agree or strongly agree that CLN ‘creates a culture of information sharing between local and citywide agencies’ (Chart 3). As a consequence, it would seem that this has enhanced the collaborative and partnership approach and created a “*sense of belonging*” for all involved.

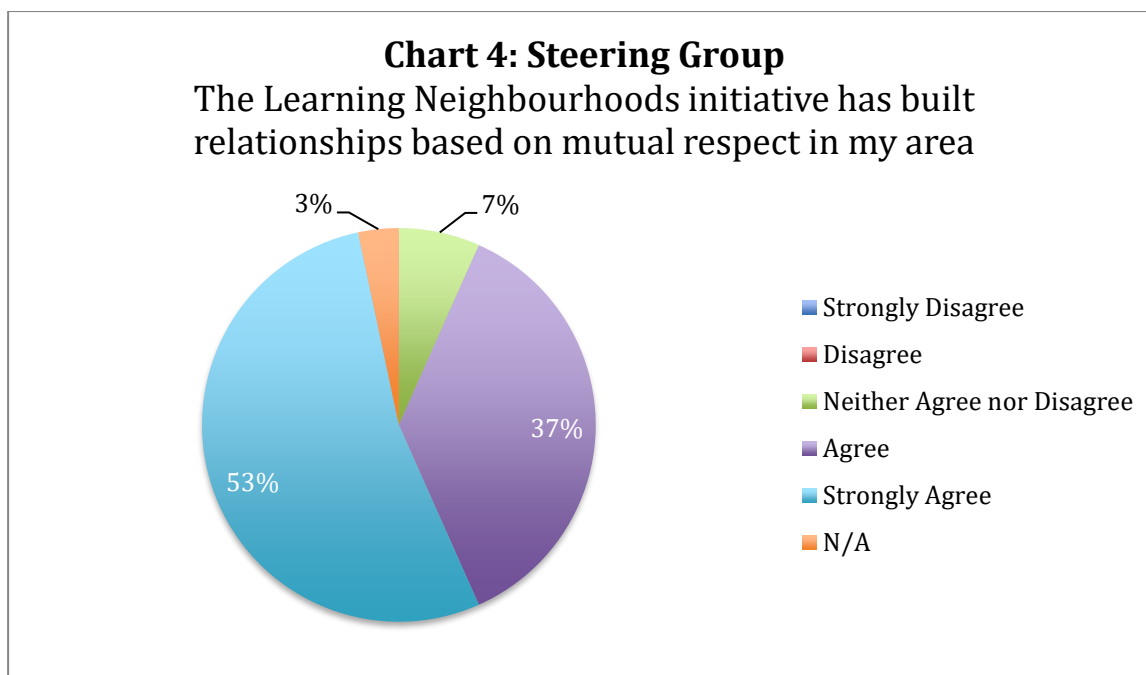
Dr. O'Tuama identifies the importance of CLN having strong and weak ties and that these ties can have an impact on how neighbourhoods work together. He identifies that the CLN is supporting these types of connections for learners and organisations locally and at city level. This is echoed by the focus group, when discussing informal learning occurring between different CLNs:

*“To see what other neighbourhoods had done and what worked well was really helpful and it helped us to shape some of our CLN activities”* (Focus Group member).

## **Theme 2.2 Mutual Respect and Bottom up Approach**

Mutual respect between all partners is a key aspect of the CLN initiative. 90% of steering group respondents agree or strongly agree that the CLN is built on relationships of mutual respect (Chart 4). Partnering organisations at local and city level include formal educational organisations, community providers, charities and learners. Focus group members also suggest that there is a sense of equal partnership based on mutual respect in CLN as highlighted below in the context of citywide partnering organisations.

*“There is a real sense of equal partnership. Each education institution has its strengths and whichever institution was in the best place to support the community needs, they provided that support.”* (Focus group member)



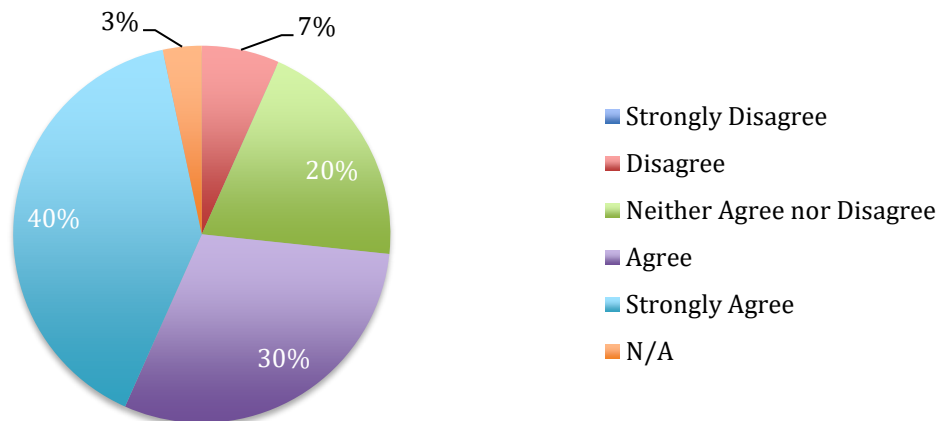
There is evidence of extensive consultation in each neighbourhood in the lead up to establishing a Learning Neighbourhood (O’Sullivan & Kenny, 2016; 2017). The focus group discussed that while the CLN is a top down initiative, as it came from the CLC and did not organically grow from the community, the time and effort dedicated to consultation with neighbourhoods is extremely important and is essential to working as equal partners with mutual respect. Mr. Barrett outlined the respect he and others have for neighbourhood’s decisions as well as supporting their ideas.

*“The Learning Neighbourhoods is an open hand...when a local area say we want to do X, it might not be what I thought was a great idea...if a community say they want to do X, and it’s under the Learning Neighbourhood initiative, they get supported... by UCC, City Council and all partners.” (Appendix 10.1 Full Quote)*

Chart 5 shows 70% of steering group respondents agree or strongly agree that the CLN has supported a bottom up approach to lifelong learning. This would suggest that the consultation-based approach based on mutual respect could be supporting this. 7% of steering group respondents disagrees, while 20% neither agreed nor disagreed. This may suggest that more needs to be done in this area. Dr. O’Tuama outlined that consultation and engagement needs to continue and be a regular aspect of the CLN: *“We need to ask that question each time.... What did we do this year to bring in new people?” (Appendix 10.2 Full Quote)*

### Chart 5: Steering Group

The Learning Neighbourhoods initiative has supported a bottom up approach to lifelong learning in my area.

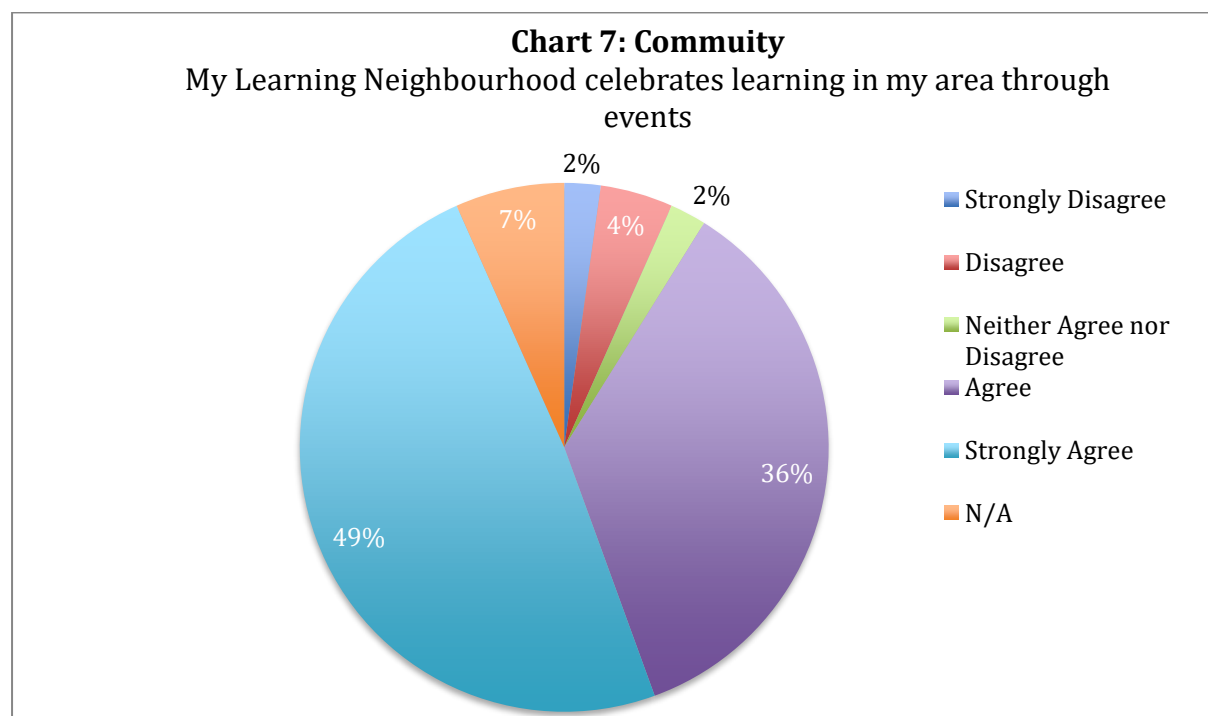
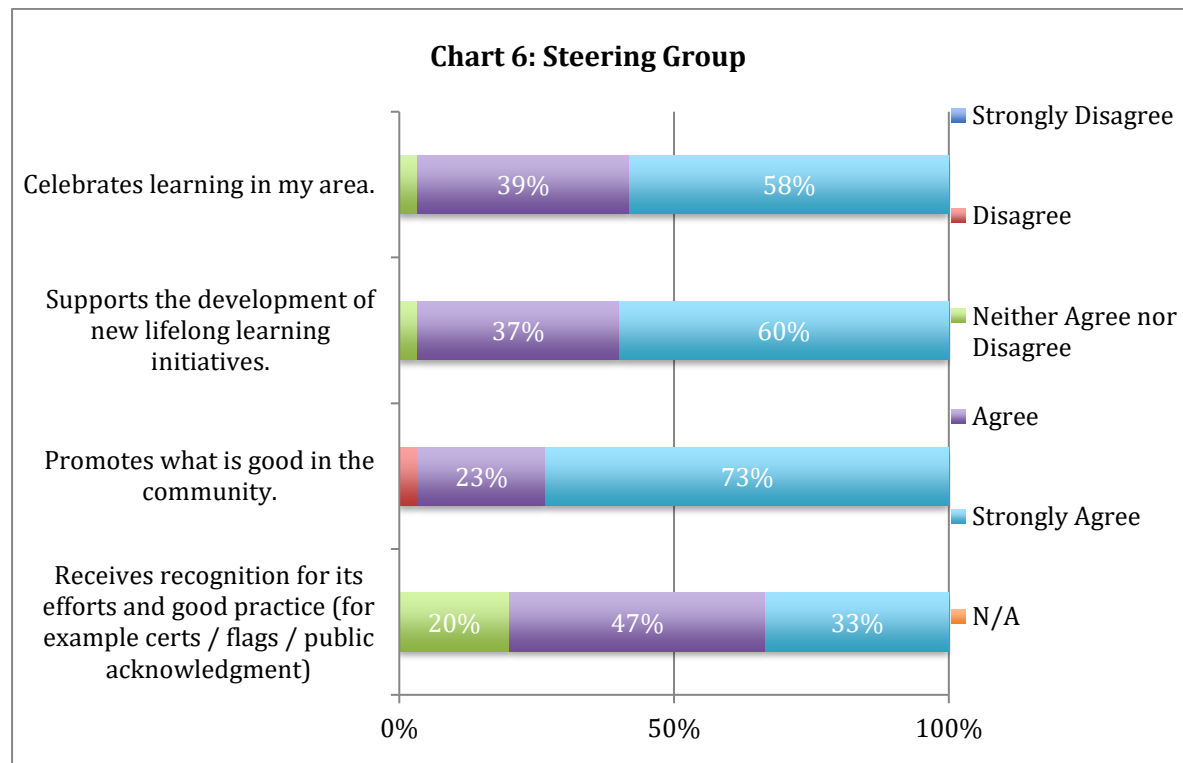


The evidence suggests that the CLN values building genuine and open relationships based on mutual respect with all who want to be involved. This in turn seems to encourage a culture of reciprocal mutual respect leading to collaboration, partnership and consultation towards a shared CLN vision, which is impacting positively on a consultative bottom up approach.

### **Theme 2.3 Celebrating, Recognising and Validating Existing Learning & Creating New Learning**

According to the focus group, celebrating and recognising learning through events and projects is central to the CLN. Celebrating learning in all its forms is strongly supported in both surveys (Chart 6 and 7) with the community and steering group agreeing or strongly agreeing that CLN celebrates learning 85% and 97% respectively. 80% of steering group respondents agree or strongly agree that they receive recognition for their CLN efforts and good practice. The focus group identified the local CLN flags, the CLC certificates and CLN reports (O Sullivan and Kenny, 2016; 2017) as examples of celebration, recognition and validation of neighbourhood's contributions. The focus group highlighted that this is having a positive impact on individuals and neighbourhoods as a whole by creating more access and awareness of existing learning opportunities, building a platform for promoting what is good in the community and creating new learning initiatives. This is also supported by the steering group

survey with 96% of respondents highlighted that the CLN promotes what is good in the community and 97% say it supports the development of new lifelong learning initiatives.



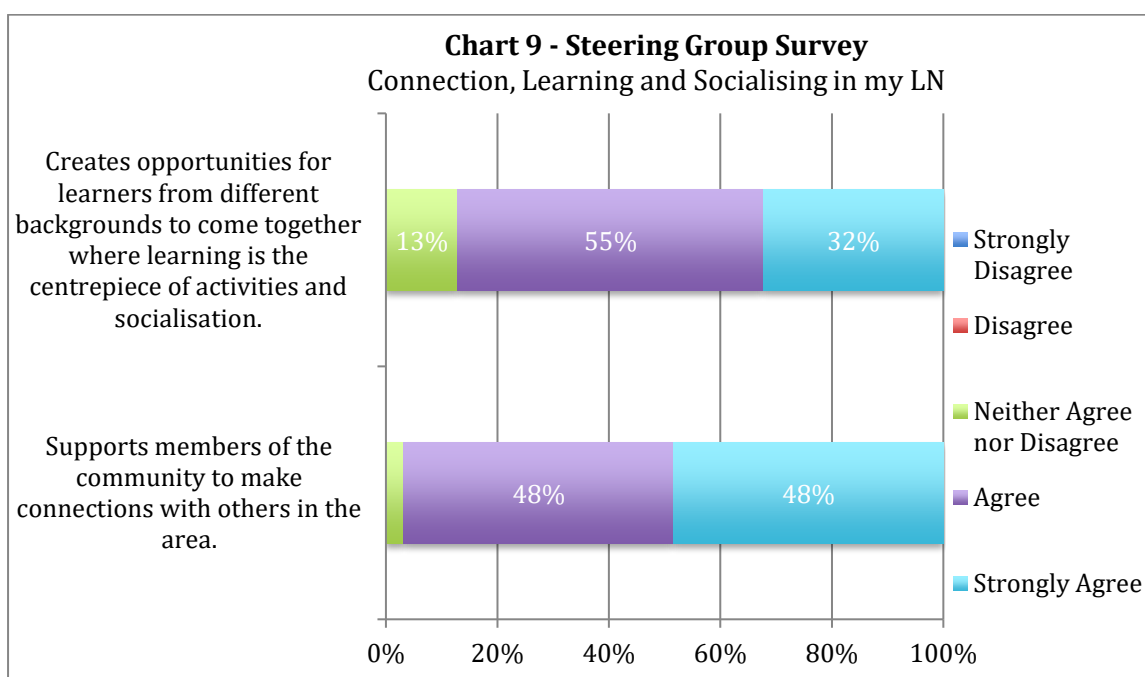
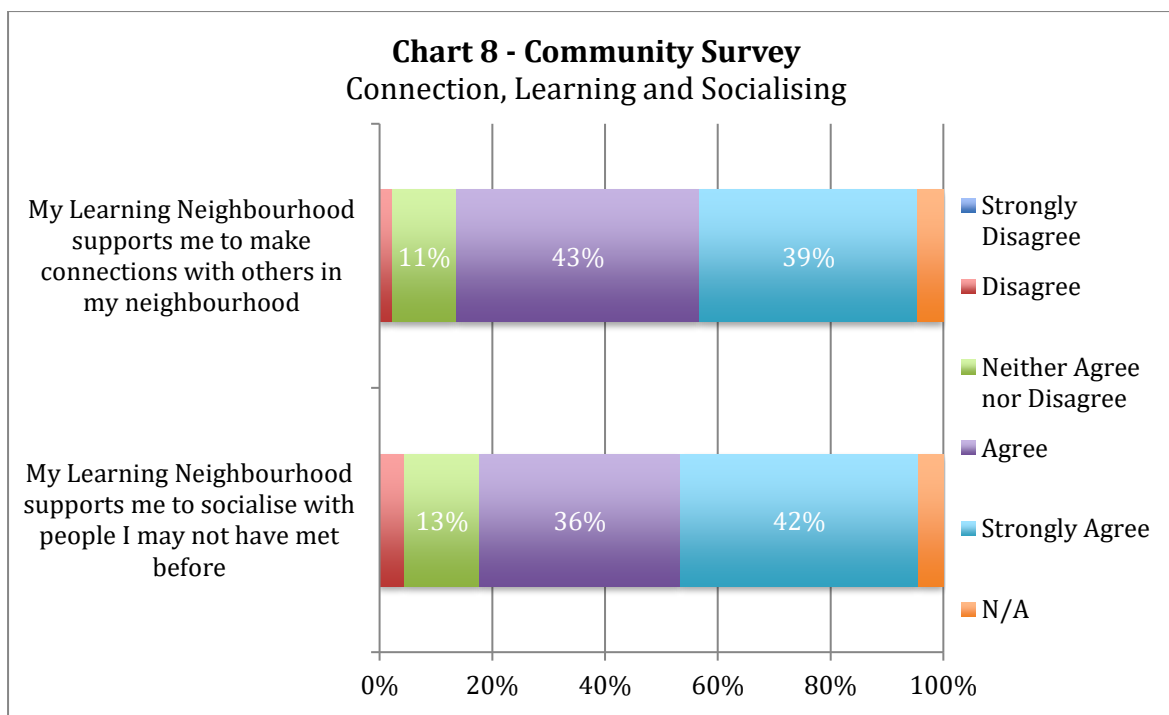
Dr. O'Tuama also highlights the importance of validation of non-formal learning

*“Validation of non-formal learning, is not always about getting a qualification or securing a job, it is about acknowledging the learning done, which is extremely important, and which can lead to self-confidence”.*

The focus group identified that the CLN gives a platform for all forms of learning to be acknowledged, showcased and celebrated, which can lead to an increase in self-confidence and a sense of identity. Focus group members and interviewee's acknowledged that the CLLLF historically supported and created these kinds of celebratory opportunities. It was originally hoped that the CLN would generate similar outcomes to the CLLLF. The evidence suggests that celebrating, recognising and validating learning can lead to the creation of new learning opportunities and potentially increase participation, engagement and confidence in neighbourhoods.

#### **Theme 2.4 Connection, Learning and Socialising**

Connections in the CLN seem to be made through supporting people to socialise as well as learn. 82% of community respondents highlight that the CLN supports them to make connections and 78% identify the CLN supports them to socialise with people they have not met before (Chart 8). Chart 9 further supports this, with 87% and 96% of steering group respondents agree or strongly agree that the CLN is creating connections and opportunities for socialising where learning is the centrepiece of activity. This suggests that the CLN is creating opportunities for members in neighbourhoods and at city level to connect, learn and socialise together.



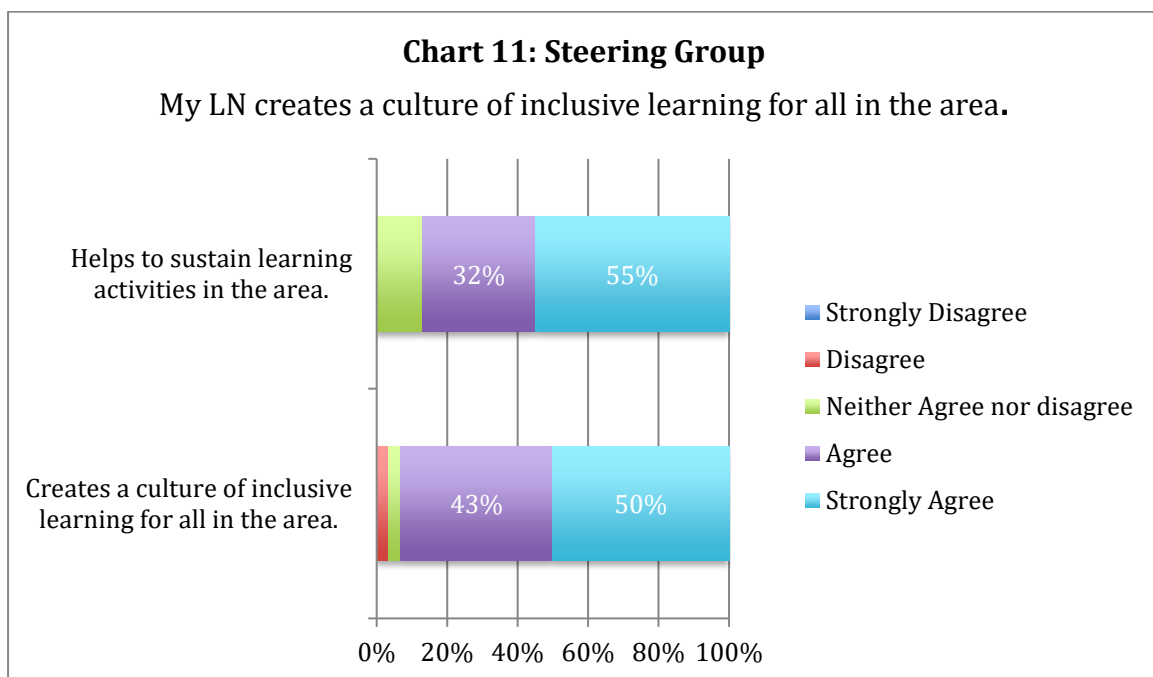
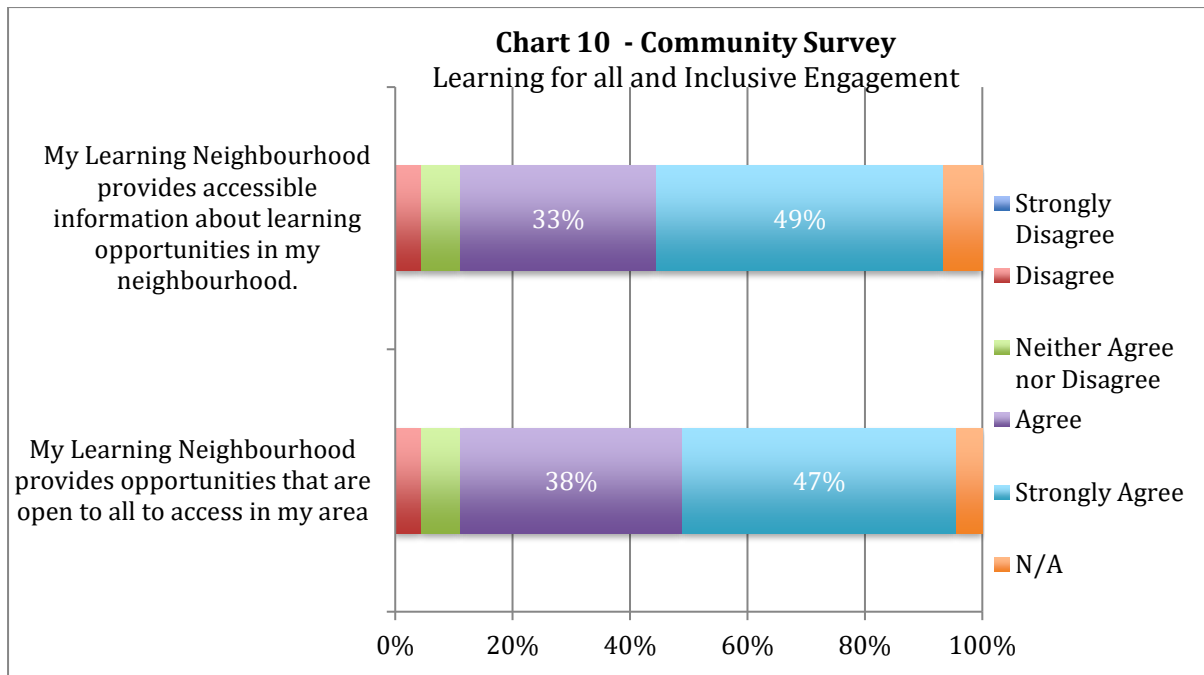
According to the focus group, the social aspect of learning is as important if not more important in some cases than the learning itself. *“They (people in the community) see us (community education providers) as a social outlet. I think we do have a lot of learners, but they don’t see themselves as learners”*. Socialising and meeting new people as part of learning is echoed by a community respondent, *“It is always a great opportunity to be able to*

*learn/grow regardless of age, ability, knowledge. I love the fact I had ability to meet new friends whilst learning new skills”.*

### **Theme 2.5 Learning for all, Inclusive Engagement and Sustainable Learning**

82% and 85% of community respondents agreed or strongly agree with the statements ‘My CLN provides accessible information about learning opportunities in my neighbourhood’ and ‘My CLN provides opportunities that are open to all to access in my area’ respectively (Chart 10). This is further supported by respondents from the steering group survey with 93% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement ‘My CLN creates a culture of inclusive learning for all in the area’ (chart 11). A community respondent identified that *“The learning neighbourhoods identified the level of community activity and therefore community learning that is happening in our area. This was an eye opening insight into how my community is engaged in offering all types of activities, learning, personal development and cross generational contact.”*

In the context of sustainable learning, 87% of steering group respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the CLN helps to sustain learning activities in an area (Chart 11). A focus group member expands on this by highlighting that the CLN is *“a vehicle to engage with communities and to allow for that collaboration to happen. It’s an opportunity to hear the needs on the ground as opposed to assuming what communities would need in terms of learning”.*

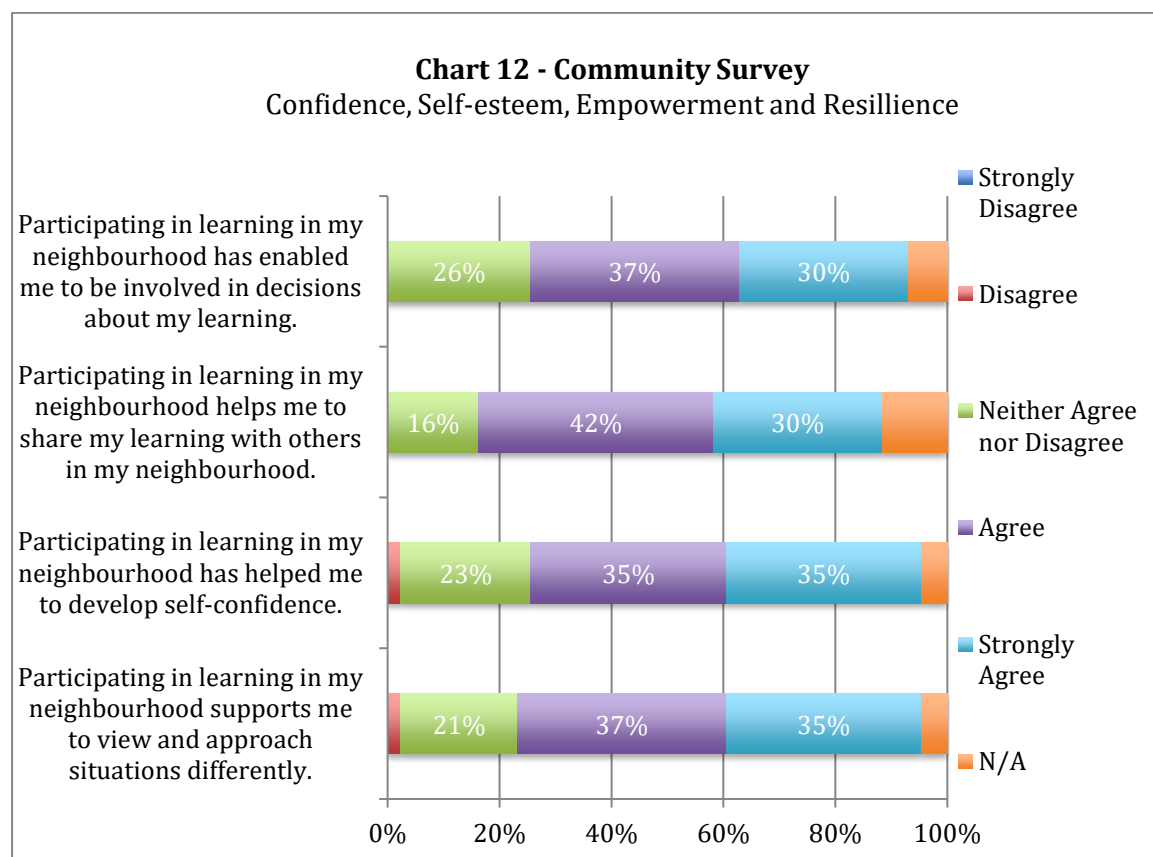




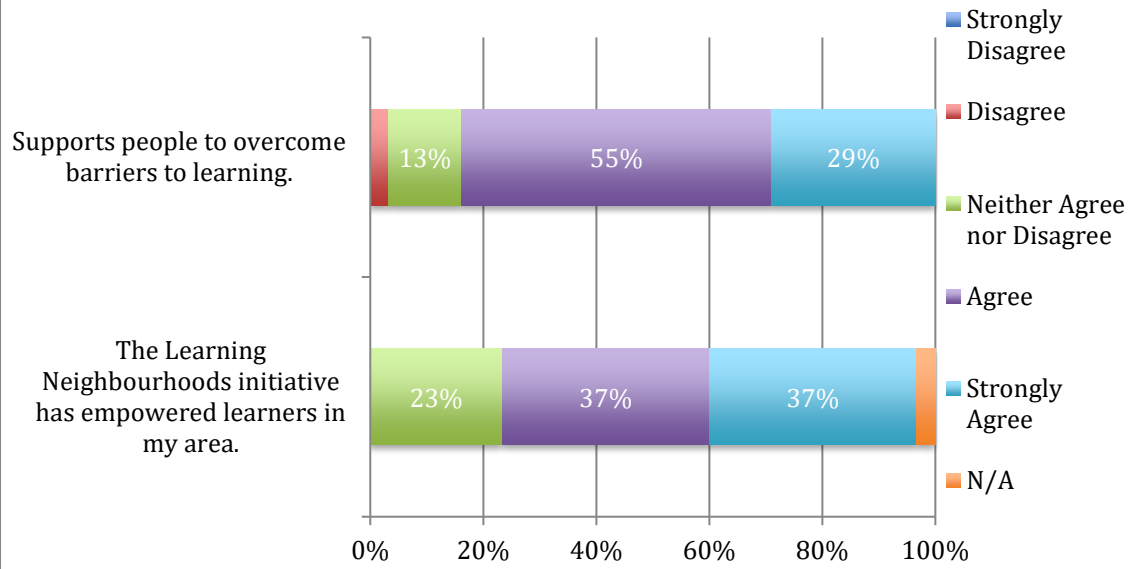
## **Theme 2.6 Confidence, Self-esteem and Empowerment**

72% and 70% of community respondents agree or strongly agree with the statements ‘Participating in learning in my neighbourhoods supports me to view and approach situations differently’ and ‘Participating in learning in my neighbourhood has helped me to develop self-confidence’ respectively (Chart 12). A community respondent expands on this by saying, “*Learning has given me a sense of my true self and with the help of the courses I have been given the tools to follow many of my own dreams*”.

74% of steering group respondents identify that the CLN initiative has empowered learners and 84% highlight that CLN has supported people to overcome barriers to learning (Chart 13). Focus group members identified that while some of these outcomes were being achieved prior to the CLN being established, they suggested that the CLN has created a framework for these outcomes to be celebrated and recognised which has enhanced learners and workers confidence, self-esteem and empowerment.

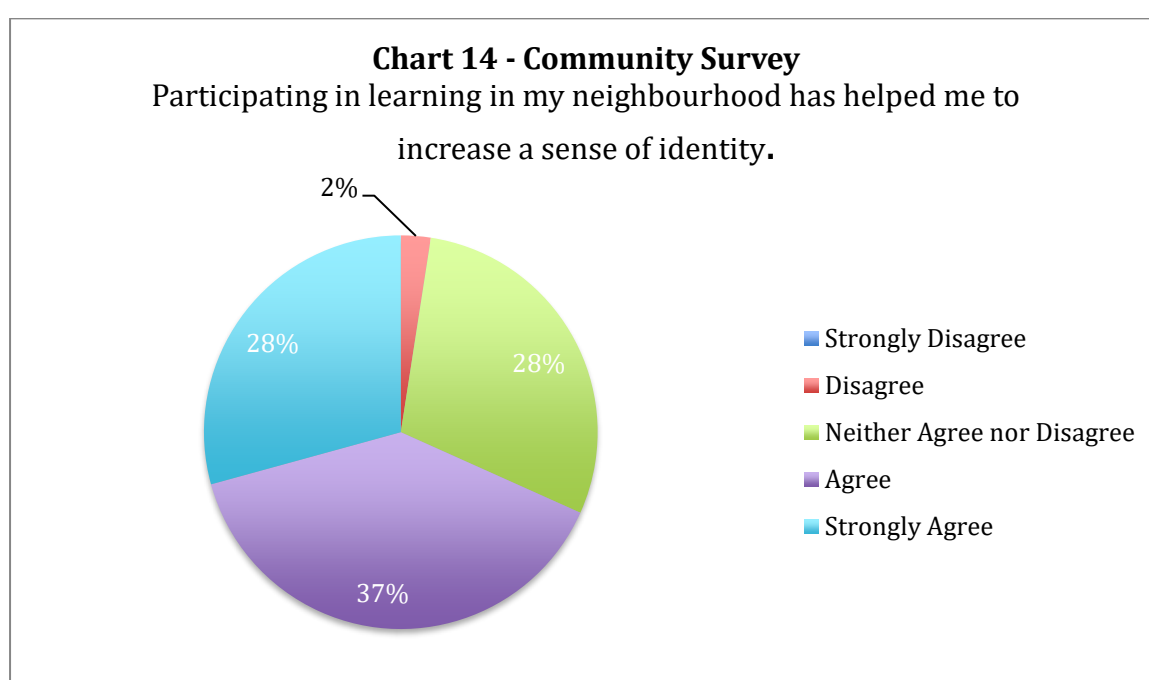


**Chart 13 - Steering Group Survey**  
Confidence, Self-esteem, Empowerment and



### **Theme 3 Identity, Cultural, Human Capital and Mental Health Impact**

65% of community respondents agree or strongly agree that ‘participating in learning in their neighbourhood increases a sense of identity’ (Chart 14). The CLN seems to have created a culture and a platform where all learning is acknowledged, valued and celebrated. One community respondent outlined, “*The many local events organised by CLN brings with it a great sense of pride in the people and the area*”. Accessing and celebrating all learning through events and projects in neighbourhoods seems to lead to stronger identity, a sense of belonging and a sense of ownership over one’s own destiny as well as encouraging active citizenship and developing pride of place.



Evidence of cultural capital can be seen in how people learn and access learning (Charts 7 & 10), whom they are learning from (Charts 8 & 12) and what people are learning (Chart 12 & appendix 11). Mr. Barrett outlines that he believes there is the beginning of a paradigm shift from education to learning. He discusses this in the context of community education networks and learning neighbourhoods as well as Cities of learning and Learning Cities. He highlights that community education and Cities of Learning focus predominately on formal education to combat education disadvantage by focus on “*equalising data*”. While he identifies the importance of formal learning in the context of up-skilling and seeking employment, he suggests it also has limitations and does not capture all types of learning. Mr. Barrett states that the CLN’s approach to tackling education disadvantage is different.

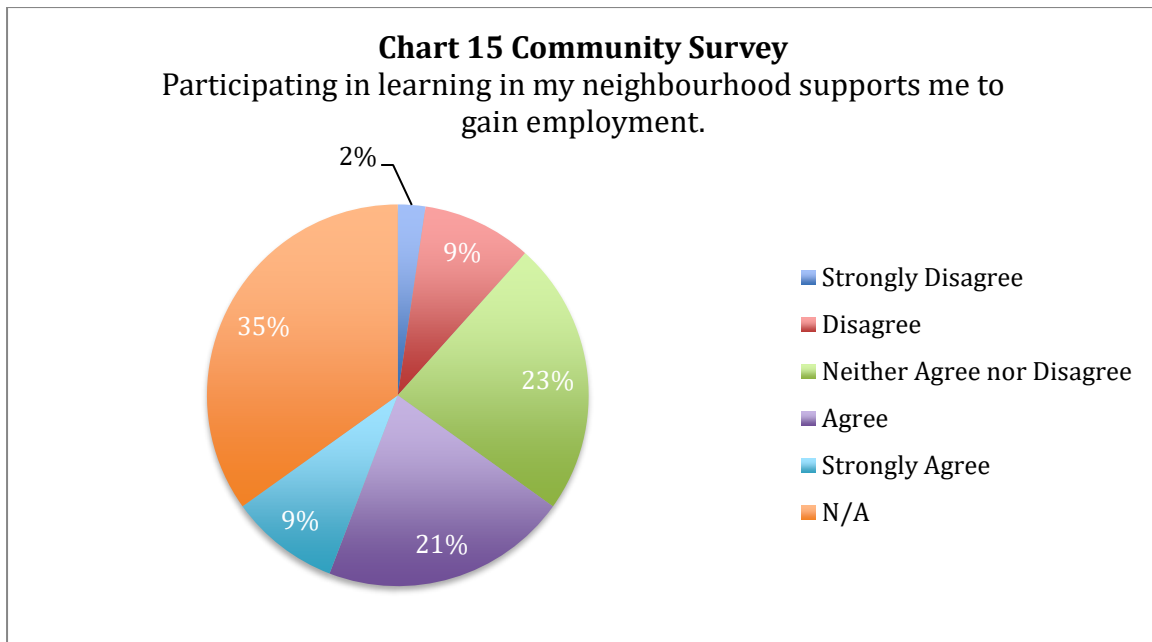
*“The CLN is not setting out to name or chase it, but instead putting in place measures where all learning is celebrated, with the vision that this will create a culture of learning in the neighbourhoods and support the members in that neighbourhood to reach their full learning potential. These results (surveys) are telling me that this shift is beginning”.*

Dr. O’Tuama supports this by stating:

*“If you make a conscious statement that learning is important in your neighbourhood, you are already in a different place... The challenge is putting that into action, flying the flag and doing it consciously on a day to day basis, this is what Learning Neighbourhoods are doing”.*

According to a focus group member the CLN is *“about developing and celebrating the capacity of people and to improve skills in all areas, and it is not just up-skilling or education and training for employment”.*

When discussing that a minority (44% - Chart 15) of community respondents supported the statement, ‘participating in learning in my neighbourhood supports me to gain employment’ Mr Barrett outlined that *“the other effects I think are much more fundamental and much more to do with the ability to go and achieve whatever your goals are in life...in terms of a hierarchy of needs having the fundamental skills in place is critical to be able to progress in other areas”.* This is supported by a focus group member; *“if you don’t have those building block and you do move onto the next (education) level, it is going to be much harder”.* Considering that the majority of community respondents identified that they participated in informal learning in the past twelve months (Appendix 6 & 11) and that the CLN learning priorities are not all geared towards employability, 44% of community respondents identifying that learning supports them to gain employment’ could be considered high in this regard.



Learning in ones neighbourhood and CLN events seem to have a major impact on individual's mental health. 80% of community respondents (Chart 16) agree or strongly agree that learning has a positive effect on their mental health with many community respondents elaborated on this:

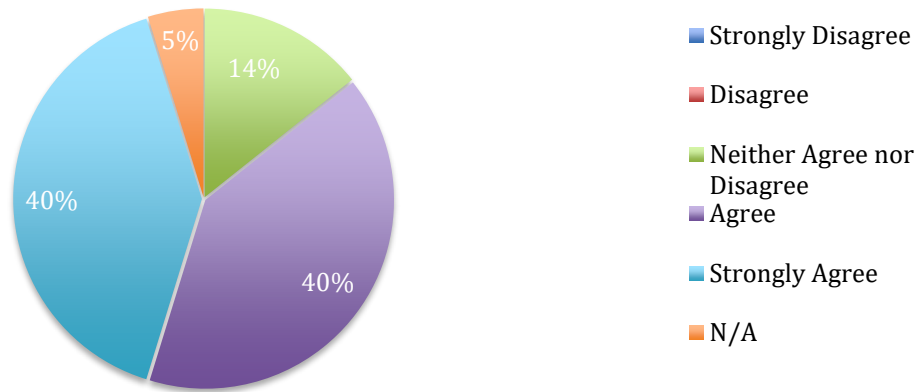
*“Learning increased my confidence and skills set and has helped me to take care of my mindfulness and emotional mental health.”*

*“Being in this community choir has enhanced my life in so many ways that I couldn't have imagined. My mental health and appreciation for well being has developed greatly since joining this community group.”*

This demonstrates that learning in one's neighbourhood positively impacts on people's mental health. The CLN approach to celebrating all learning seems to compliment and enhance this outcome. It also highlights the symbiotic relationship between developing a sense of belonging and a culture of connecting through learning and positive mental health, which goes beyond but can also feed into employment.

### Chart 16 - Community Survey

Participating in learning in my neighbourhood positively affects my mental health.



## **Section 2**

### **Current Learning Neighbourhood Models of Practice**

#### **Introduction**

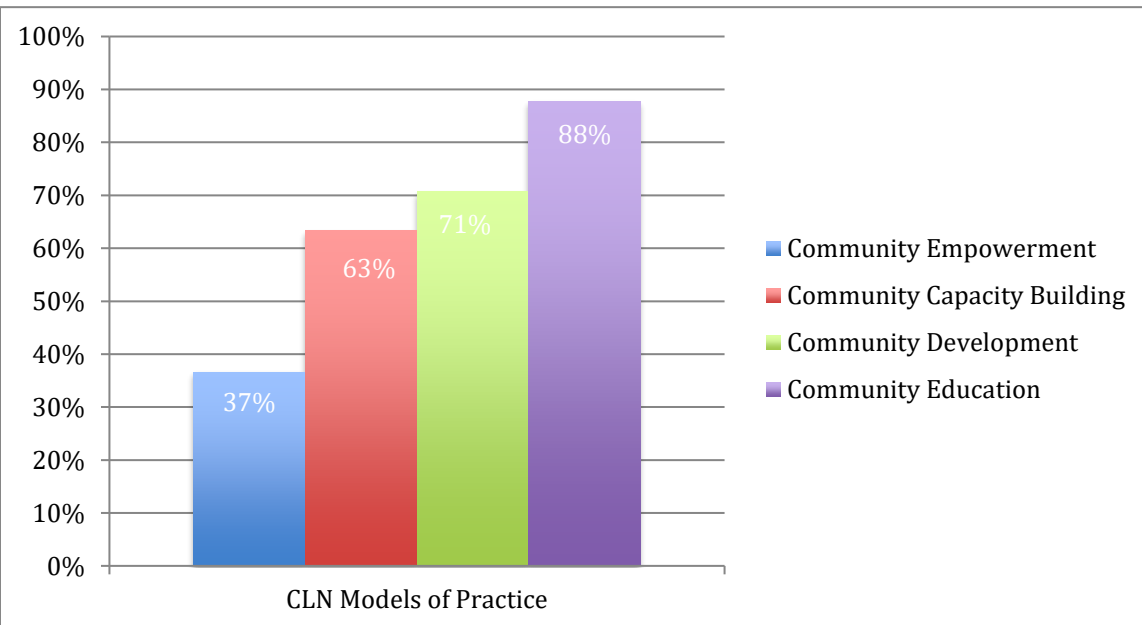
The findings documented above highlight the significant impacts of CLN on individualises and neighbourhoods. The following section explores current and sustainable models practice of the CLN as well as challenges and threats to the model.

#### **2.1 Current Models of Practice**

Evidence suggests a neighbourhood centred integrative and participatory approach to a hybrid and evolving model of practice has been adopted across all CLNs. This hybrid model includes elements of community education, community development, community capacity building and community empowerment (Chart 17). Variations of these models can be seen across each neighbourhood (Chart 18). Community education scored highest in Mayfield, Ballypheane, Togher and South Parish, while community capacity building scored highest in Knocknaheeny and community capacity building and community development scored equally highest in The Glen. This suggests that multiple approaches in neighbourhoods are taken in response to the needs in their area. One steering group respondent highlights this by saying, *“The Learning Neighbourhoods has a diversity in it’s model of practices which has created a greater sense of cohesion within the community which has allowed Mayfield and it’s residents to go from strength to strength”*.

**Chart 17 – Steering Group**

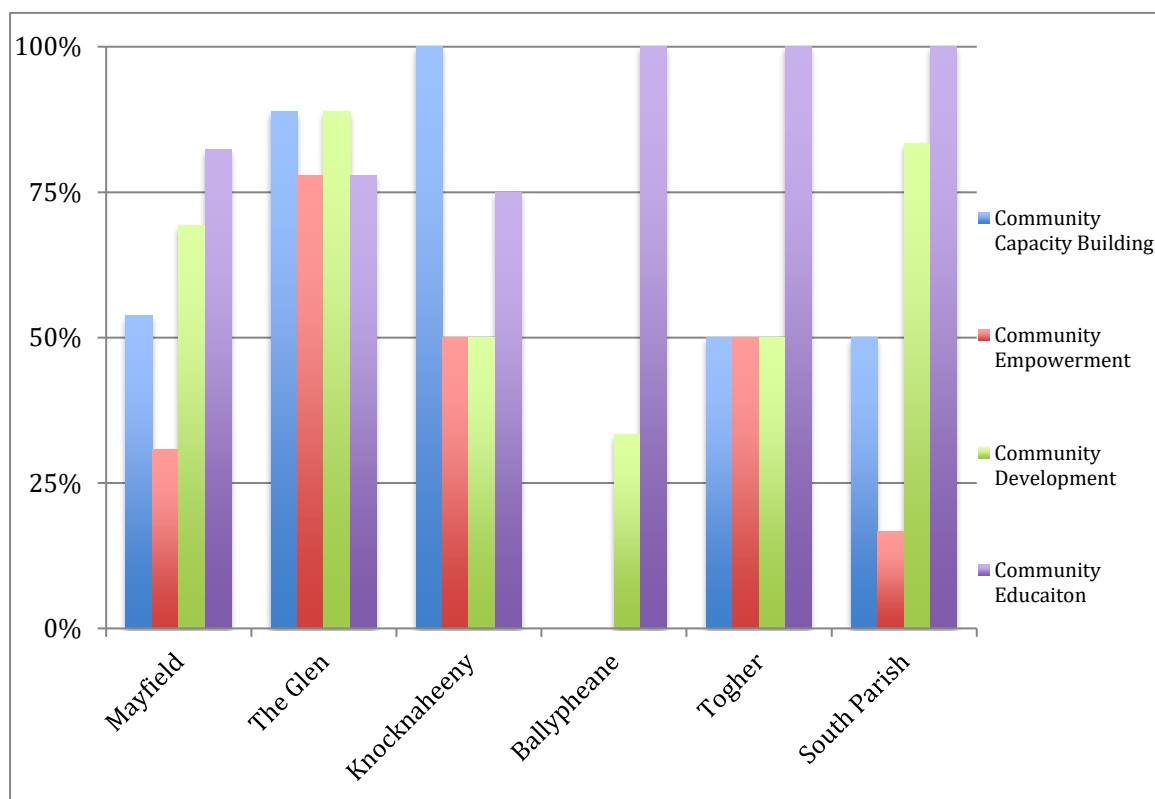
Which of the following best describes your learning neighbourhood model of practice. Please note you can tick more than one.



**Chart 18 – Steering Group**

Which of the following best describes your learning neighbourhood model of practice (by Learning Neighbourhood).

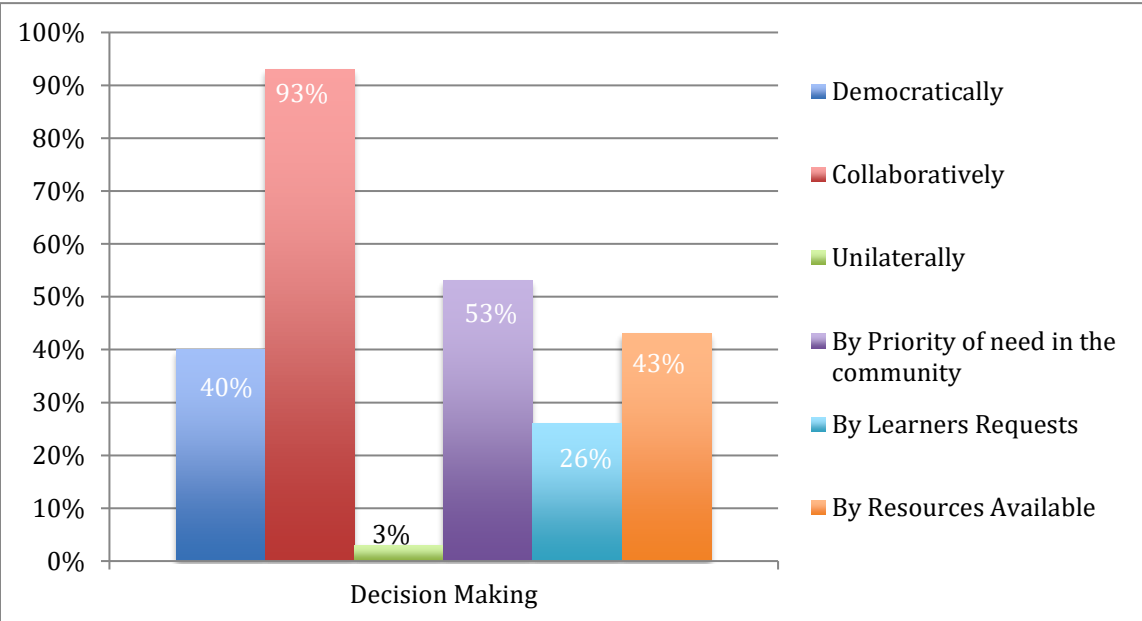




Main themes and outcomes arising from each of the neighbourhoods include sharing information, ideas, expertise and a vision, engagement in and awareness of local learning opportunities and inclusive learning approaches (Appendix 12 for more detail). Chart 19 demonstrates the preferred method of decision-making in all CLN is collaborative. Similar to models of practice, there are slight variations of decision-making processes across neighbourhoods (chart 20), including decision-making by resources available and priority of need. The latter is supported by Chart 21, where 71% of steering group respondents agree or strongly agree that the CLN is responding to need in their area.

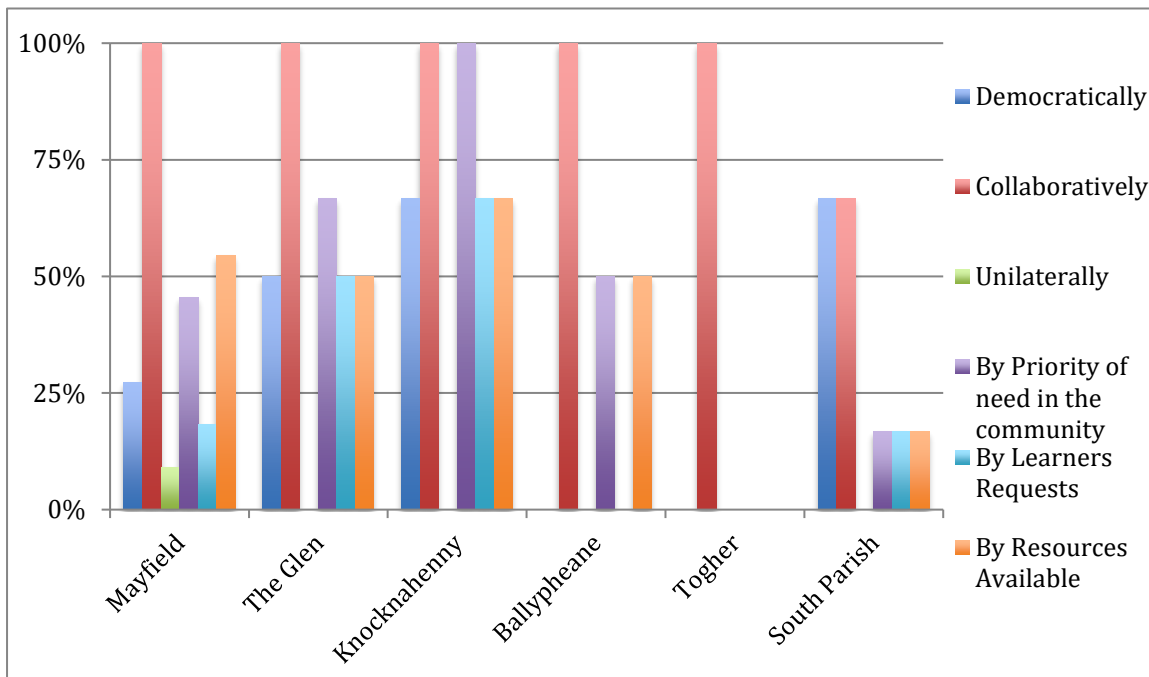
**Chart 19 – Steering Group**

How does your Learning Neighbourhoods Steering Group make decision?

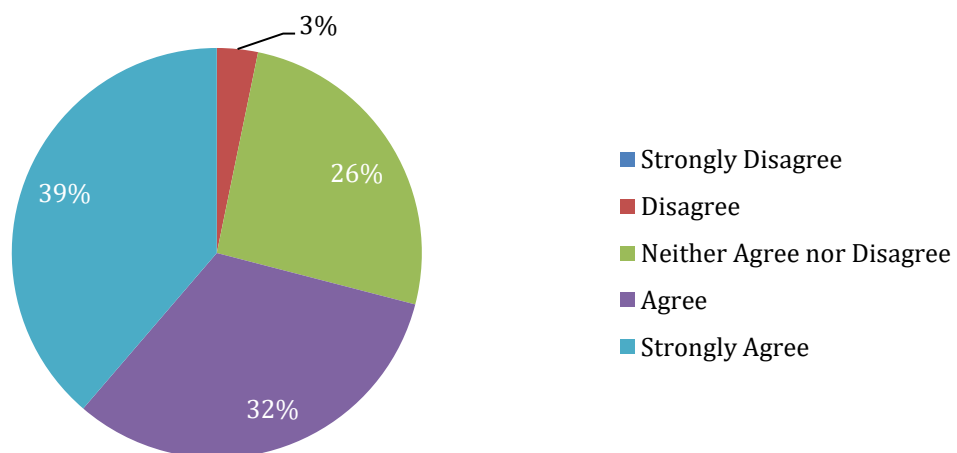


**Chart 20 – Steering Group**

How does your Learning Neighbourhoods Steering Group make decision (by neighbourhood?)



**Chart 21 - Steering Group**  
My Learning Neighbourhood  
Responds to identified needs in the area



As identified earlier in section 2.3, it was hoped that the CLN would achieve similar results to the CLLLF. The focus group consensus was that a hybrid and evolving model of practice allowed outcomes achieved in the CLLLF to be further progressed and integrated into neighbourhoods. The focus group agreed that neighbourhoods had different experiences that influenced this as well as different experiences that influenced the establishment of their CLN. While some identified the CLLLF as their main influence, others identified Community Education Networks as foundations for their initial local CLN projects. The focus group highlighted that while local CLNs shared a lot of similarities, historical learning approaches, demographics, social and economic environment, community and learning organisations present in the area, willingness to be involved and geographical location were some of the facets that impacted on the initial CLN approach and how their local hybrid model of practice evolved.

## **2.2 Model of practice - Resources**

Evidence suggests that the CLC as well as the CLC partnering organisations support the CLN both financially and non-financially. Regarding financial resources, chart 22 shows local CLN financial supports include allocated funding from CLC, sponsorship, fundraising and grant aid. Analysis from steering group respondents of each CLN (appendix 13) highlight different financial supports as their highest contributions. TLN identifies grant aid, KLN, GLN, SPLN and BLN identified allocated funding from CLC and MLN identify sponsorship, fundraising and allocated funding from CLC equally as their highest contributors.

**Chart 22 – Steering Group**

Funding

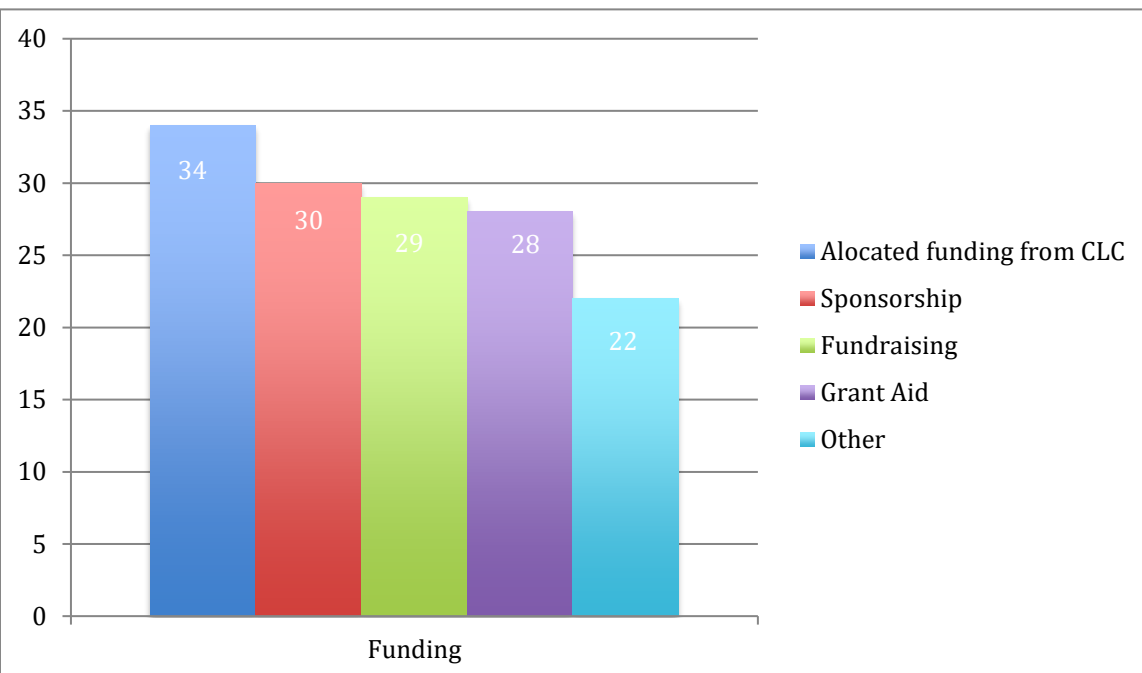
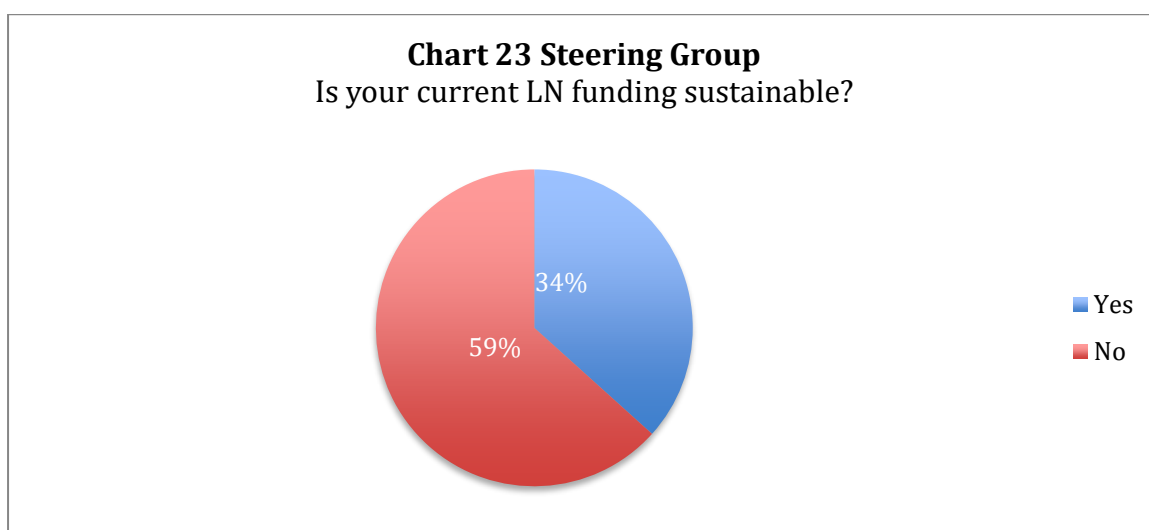


Chart 23 outlines that the majority (59%) of steering group respondents consider current CLN funding unsustainable and all neighbourhoods identify that funding comes from multiple

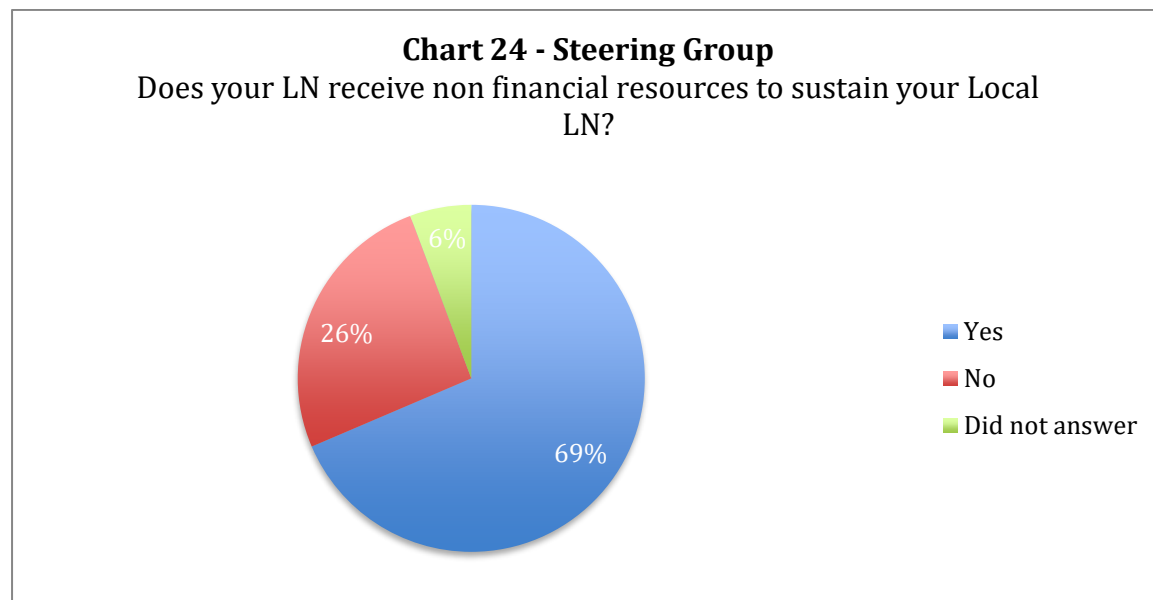
sources. The focus group suggested that acquiring additional funding from multiple sources can be very time consuming. While focus group members agree being part of the CLN adds strength to funding applications, they highlight that grant funding is not guaranteed. Focus group members also highlighted the importance of funding for the sustainability of the CLN.

**Chart 23 Steering Group**  
Is your current LN funding sustainable?



69% of steering group respondents highlight that they do receive non-financial resources (Chart 24). These include supports from the CLC partnering organisation and CLN Co-ordinator through ACE, UCC, input of time and commitment from staff of local

organisations, support from local businesses and commitment from the local community through volunteering. Steering group respondents and focus group members identified the importance of continued support and advocacy from local and CLC partnering organisations and staff. One focus group member stated, *“The time and commitment our own organisations allow us to be involved in the Learning Neighbourhoods Committee ensures the on-going success of Learning Neighbourhoods”* (see Appendix 14 for additional supporting quotes). Building local support and volunteers, branding and messaging, training and a commitment and passion and belief in the CLN were also identified as key non-financial resource required for sustainable development (see appendix 15 for more detail).

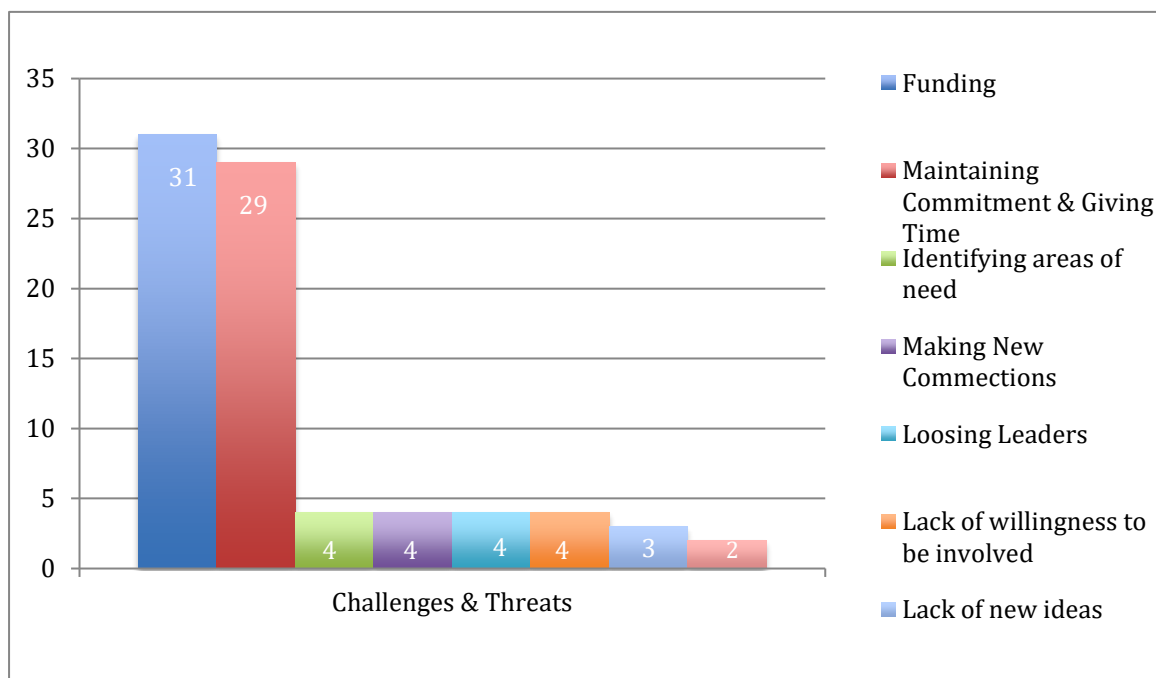


## 2.3 Challenges and threats to sustainability – Model of Practice

The steering group survey identified “*Lack of funding*”, “*losing community leaders over time*”, “*Covid-19*”, “*personal changing in organisations*”, “*maintaining energy and commitment*” and “*members of steering committee feeling overstretched and leaving*” leading to “*burn out*” as some of challenges and threats to the sustainability of this model. Following an analysis of challenges and threats to the CLN arising from an open question chart 25 shows the frequency and priority of these themes arising. Funding is identified as the highest challenge followed closely by maintaining commitment and giving time.

**Chart 25 - Steering Group Survey**

Challenge & Threats identified in open question



Regarding the latter, burnout and feeling overstretched were identified by steering group respondents as facets of these challenges. Focus group members identified that local steering group members representing organisations take on local CLN representative rolls as additional to their daily work, which has added to their work commitments significantly. It must be noted that both funding and maintaining commitment and giving time were highlighted significantly more times as challenges and threats compared to others. Challenges and threats including losing leaders due to burnout and making new connections locally could be as a consequence of the funding and maintaining commitment challenges. Dr. O'Tuama, identifies

providing supports to local learners to connect with other learners outside of their neighbourhoods as a challenge, but suggests that the connections between the different CLN as well as connections with the CLLLF, CLC and UNESCO Learning Cities could act as supports to achieve this.

The focus group and interviewees identified approaches to support the sustainability of this model and overcome some these challenges. These include an annual renewal process in each neighbourhood to re-engage and consult with neighbourhood members. Exploring the possibilities of a learner's forum or smaller meeting groups in CLN's to create and facilitate more participation opportunities and increase a sense of local ownership of the programme. Use the annual renewal process as a mechanism to identify local learning needs and a learning neighbourhood action plan. Devise ways of evaluating and monitoring the learning action plan. Utilizing local and CLC resources more effectively to achieve the plan. Continue to create opportunities for cross-neighbourhood learning and extend this locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. Finally, developing a clear messaging and branding plan for each neighbourhood. (Appendix 16 examines these themes further).



## **Discussion**

This research aims to document the impact of the CLN initiative and identify current and sustainable models of practice. The findings of this research suggest the CLN is having a positive impact on social, identity, cultural and human capital as well as mental health. It also highlights that a neighbourhood centred integrative and participatory approach to a hybrid and evolving model of practice has been adopted across all CLNs.

The CLN hybrid model includes community education, community development, community capacity building and community empowerment. Each of the six CLN's adopts a neighbourhood centred approach to this model based on a number of factors including demographics, local learning needs, resources available and organisations or groups willing to participate. Evidence suggests that this approach is providing a multi-level framework based on building relationships and partnerships with organisations and residence. Mutual respect and sustainable development with learning as the focal point is central to this approach, which supports and creates opportunities for collaboration, partnership, connections and celebrations locally and citywide. A bottom up approach grounded in consultation and co-creation and that is inclusive and open to all was used in the planning and establishment phases of CLN's. This encourages engagement and participation which allows for strong and weak ties to be developed to promote and utilise local learning resources as well as creates a framework for organisations and individual learners to connect, learn and socialise together and work to achieve common goals (Courtney 1992; Maycome 2018 in O'Tuama, 2020; UNESCO, 2015; Schuler, 2010). Coordinating learning events and project locally as well as sharing information and resources are also key facets of the CLN. These approaches and the outcomes the CLN are achieving are grounded in the UIL key guidelines for building a Learning City (UNESCO, 2015a). The CLN approach is also supported by O'Brien and O'Fathaigh (2007) in the context of learning partnerships and collaborative processes to advocate for local learning needs as well as the OECD (2012) and Kearns (2012) in building partnerships for a shared vision and EcCoWell cities respectively.

Recognition and validation of all learning by CLN creates opportunities for people to promote and celebrate their learning, giving rise to an increase in social capital (Dave, 1975; Longworth, 2003), including areas such as active citizenship (Edwards, 1997; UNICE, 2001; Commission of European Communities, 2000; DES, 2000) and social inclusion (Yang & Valdes-Cotera, 2011; OECD, 2007; Field, 2002; Government of Ireland, 2000a; 2007).

Celebrating and recognising all learning through events and projects also enhances social cohesion in learning neighbourhoods which is one of the six priorities in ‘the Learning for Life’ White Paper (DES, 2000), as well as the UIL Learning Cities guidelines (UNESCO, 2013, UNESCO, 2018) and a core aspect of social capital according to Putnam (1995) and Longworth (1995). The CLN embraces an action-based culture of inclusive learning for all (O’Tuama, 2020 forthcoming), with opportunities to engage and participate in Learning Neighbourhoods processes as well as creating accessible information and advocating for equality of learning opportunities. This is in line with reports and goals including UNESCO SDG 4 & 11 goals (UNESCO, 2017) and UIL’s Beijing Declaration (UNESCO, 2013) to name but a few. Identify capital (Schuler, 2010; O’Tuama, 2020); cultural capital (Delors, 2013; Mortimore, 1999; OECD, 2007, DES, 2000; O’Brien & O’Faithaigh, 2007; O’Tuama, 2020) and enhancing human capital (O’Brien and O’Faithaigh, 2015; Schuler, 2010) can also be considered as positive outcomes of the CLN initiative. These outcomes support O’Tuama’s (2020) conclusion that the CLN supports all four of these capital areas.

This research indicates that the CLN is impacting positively on individuals mental health through supporting learning activities, creating a sense of belonging through events and projects and enhancing current as well as creating new social opportunities where learning is the central activity (Schuler, 2010; O’Tuama, 2020). This results in an increase of confidence, self-esteem and empowerment for learners (Longworth, 2003; UNESCO, 2015D; UNESCO, 2018; O’Brien & O’Faithaigh, 2007). Recognition, validation and accreditation are key area of the UIL’s (UNESCO, 2020a) lifelong learning objectives, which is supporting transformational change for individuals and the neighbourhood as a whole (Baumgartner, 2001; O’Brien & O’Faithaigh, 2007; Mezirow, 1998).

In the context of creating a learning society, a collaborative approach between the CLN, the CLC and the residents of the six neighbourhoods are striving to achieve this by enhancing and supporting a paradigm shift from a focus on formal education to lifelong learning. This is grounded in a vision of vertical, horizontal and democratic concepts to lifelong learning (Holford, 1998) based on reports including Faure’s et al. (1972) and Delors et al. (1996) and guidelines set out by the UIL Learning Cities (UNESCO, 2020c; 2018; 2017a; 2017b).

While the majority of steering group respondent's support that this model responds to the learning needs in their neighbourhoods and can evolve with the neighbourhoods, the research identified challenges and threats including funding, maintaining commitment and giving time and losing leaders due to burnout, feeling overstretched or moving on. UNESCO (2015d: 164) identify the "*mobilization and utilization of resources*" to develop a learning city. To ensure the sustainability and on-going renewal of the CLN, a continued and enhanced commitment to both financial and non-financial resources will be required by all partnering organisations and neighbourhoods. Recommendations by the focus group and interviewees to achieve sustainability include an annual renewal process, learning neighbourhood action plans, monitoring and evaluating, creating learner forums and smaller local groups to feed into the local learning neighbourhood steering group and utilizing local and city wide resources more effectively.

Future research in the area should focus on a comparison of approaches and outcomes in different neighbourhoods as well as exploring and understanding the complexities, challenges, variations and reality of different types of partnership and collaborative approaches to learning neighbourhood models of practice as highlighted by O'Brien & O'Fathaigh (2007).

## **Conclusion:**

This research project identifies the impact the CLN initiative is having on six neighbourhoods in Cork City, Ireland. It also explores the neighbourhood centred, integrative and participatory approach to a hybrid and evolving model of practice in these neighbourhoods. The CLN has created a framework to allow a symbiotic relationship between multiple stakeholders at multiple levels (locally and at city wide) where a shared vision and approach to learning through celebration, recognition and validation of existing learning and new learning is central. This in turn is creating opportunities for neighbourhoods as well as CLC to achieve the goals set out by reports including UNESCO's Learning Cities Beijing Declaration (UNESCO, 2013), Guidelines for Building Learning Cities (UNESCO, 2015a) and the Cork Call to Action (UNESCO, 2017a) as well as achieving the six priorities set out in the Irish Government's "Learning for Life" White Paper (DES, 2000). These goals include empowering individuals, promoting social cohesion, promoting inclusive learning, revitalising learning in families and communities, raising consciousness, cultural development and community building. Considering Kearns (2020) learning neighbourhoods model of practice, where he describes the Learning City sets the framework and the learning neighbourhood fosters learning throughout life, in the case of Cork City it is clear that UIL Learning Cities is setting the Global framework, the CLC is embracing and leading this in Cork City and the CLN, comprising of all of the local and city partnering organisations and individual learners, are realizing and putting this into action in their local learning neighbourhoods.

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